

Judicial Branch Overview

Court Structure

There are three court levels in Minnesota: district court, court of appeals, and Minnesota Supreme Court. Minnesota has ten judicial districts that contain all district courts in the state. There is also a federal trial court for Minnesota, which is called the District Court for Minnesota.

Key Responsibilities and Jurisdiction of the Courts

District Court: The district or trial court interprets the law and applies it to the facts of specific cases. District courts may hear criminal, civil, probate, juvenile, or family law cases. The district court can also hear appeals from conciliation court (civil disputes involving less than \$15,000). There are 289 district court judges.

Court of Appeals: The 19 judges on the court of appeals review district court decisions for errors of law and sufficiency of evidence to support the verdict.

The court of appeals also:

- Reviews the validity of administrative rules and hears contested case appeals under the Administrative Procedures Act;
- Issues writs requiring district judges or public officials to take specified actions; and
- Adopts its own supplementary rules of procedure consistent with Supreme Court rules.

Minnesota Supreme Court: The seven justices of the supreme court hear the following:

- Criminal and civil appeals from the district courts and the court of appeals
- Appeals from the Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals and the Tax Court
- Important original actions provided by statute
- Writs requiring trial judges or public officials to take or refrain from taking specified action

The Minnesota Supreme Court also regulates lower courts, regulates attorneys, and oversees certain bodies involved in legal aid and public defense.

Special Statutory Courts

The Tax Court and Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals are executive branch agencies created by statute to deal with the specific areas of law that are reflected in their names.

***Differences
Between State and
Federal Court***

Cases Originating in State Trial Court: The first appeal is to the court of appeals and/or the Minnesota Supreme Court if the case concerns first-degree murder or legislative and statewide election contests.

If the case includes a claim that the United States Constitution has been violated, it can be further appealed to the United States Supreme Court.

Cases Originating in Federal Trial Court: Federal trials are generally held in Minneapolis or St. Paul. The kinds of cases heard include:

- federal statutory claims (criminal or civil);
- federal constitutional claims (criminal or civil); and
- any suit between a Minnesota resident or entity and a resident or entity from another state, involving a minimum amount of \$75,000 in damages.

Appeals go to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis, Missouri, but cases are heard in St. Paul. Appeals from Eighth Circuit decisions go to the United States Supreme Court.

***Relationship
Between Judiciary
and Legislature***

The legislative and judicial branches are co-equal. When lawsuits involve statutes, courts try to explain and enforce the legislature's intent, unless the statutes are found to violate the state or federal constitution.

The legislature has power, through the state constitution, over the state's courts in areas such as: how the court is established, abolishment of courts, the size of the court, judicial salaries, which cases the court may and may not hear, and how long judges can serve. The Supreme Court has authority over procedural issues necessary for courts to function.

For more information: Contact legislative analyst Rebecca Pirius at 651-296-5044. Also see the House Research publication *The Minnesota Judiciary*, May 2014.

The Research Department of the Minnesota House of Representatives is a nonpartisan office providing legislative, legal, and information services to the entire House.

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