



THE SUPREME COURT OF MINNESOTA
MINNESOTA JUDICIAL CENTER
25 REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BLVD.
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55155

CHAMBERS OF
LORIE S. GILDEA
CHIEF JUSTICE

(651) 296-3380

April 5, 2021

Hon. Jamie Becker-Finn, Chair
House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
559 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and

Members of the House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee:

On behalf of the judges and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, I am writing to provide testimony regarding H.F. 1030, the Judiciary Finance & Civil Law Omnibus Bill. The Minnesota Supreme Court is hearing oral arguments during your scheduled Committee time, so I am unable to attend in person.

To begin, I thank the Committee for considering our biennial budget request and for your encouraging words when we met earlier in the year regarding our budget request and the work of our courts.

As you heard in our testimony before the Committee, the judges and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch have taken unprecedented steps to preserve access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure the health and safety of everyone who uses our courts. You also heard about the long-term challenges our justice system will face as we emerge from the pandemic, including a significant case backlog, particularly among felony and gross misdemeanor criminal cases.

The Minnesota Judicial Council crafted our biennial budget request with an eye to the future, and a recognition of the fiscal constraints faced by the state. Our modest budget request seeks a 2.4 percent funding increase for compensation and benefit costs to ensure we can maintain the high-quality workforce we need to address the long-term challenges posed by the pandemic. In addition, we are requesting \$2.6 million in one-time funding to expand online access to public court records for the people of Minnesota, provide critical improvements to our cyber security program, and improve the security of our courthouses.

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We are grateful to Governor Walz for including the entirety of our budget request in his FY22-23 budget recommendations, and we appreciate that the DE3 amendment to H.F. 1030 includes funding for many parts of our budget request.

But we are very concerned that the proposed bill fails to fully fund several important parts of our request. Most concerning is the decision not to provide any compensation increases to our state's judges during the FY22-23 biennium.

Maintaining competitive compensation is critical to our ability to attract experienced attorneys to serve in the judiciary and to retain our judicial officers. Attracting and retaining skilled judges is more important than ever, as we ask our judges to adapt to the challenges of hearing cases in online hearings and socially-distanced courtrooms, and help to bring down our statewide case backlog to ensure timely access to justice.

Our request is supported by the state's Compensation Council, which, just last week, endorsed our proposal to provide judges a 3 percent salary increase in FY23. In its recommendations, the Compensation Council noted that Minnesota judges' salaries were falling behind both private and public sector attorneys, as well as judges in many other states.

Over the past several years, the Minnesota Judicial Branch has sought, and the Legislature has funded, equal compensation increases for our judges and court staff. The proposed bill goes against that precedent in failing to fund increases for judges. The Judicial Branch understands that a high-functioning court system relies on a strong partnership between the judicial officers who preside over cases, and the staff who maintain court operations and support our court users. I encourage you to adhere to your precedent and fully fund the modest salary request for judges.

The courts are one of the first promises made in our Constitution. A fully-functioning court system is essential to safeguarding our democracy, securing the rule of law, and ensuring public safety. We appreciate this Committee's past support, and we ask again for your support of our full FY22-23 budget request. With your help, our courts can continue to meet our Constitutional obligation and preserve an open door for justice in Minnesota.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the people of Minnesota, and please contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



Lorie S. Gildea
Chief Justice

cc: Minnesota Judicial Council