



MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH
MINNESOTA JUDICIAL CENTER
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SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55155

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State Representative Paul Torkelson, Committee Co-Chair
State Representative Zack Stephenson, Committee Co-Chair
Ways and Means Committee

Chair Torkelson, Chair Stephenson, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the judges and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, I write in support of H.F. 2300, the Judiciary budget bill. While this bill does not include full funding of the Judicial Branch's biennial budget request, we appreciate the thoughtful and targeted investments reflected in the bill.

The proposed funding in this bill supports a modest onetime compensation increase for judicial staff, and provides ongoing funding to cover the employer share of anticipated healthcare cost increases and address rising lease expenses at the Minnesota Judicial Center. These investments reflect a recognition of the essential role that judges and court staff play in maintaining a fair and functioning justice system. We sincerely thank Chair Liebbling, Chair Scott, and Judiciary committee members for prioritizing these needs within a very constrained budget target. This funding helps ensure that we do not need to divert resources from core court functions to cover basic operational costs.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that even with the onetime compensation increase for judicial staff, the Judicial Branch continues to face significant compensation challenges. Judicial officer and staff salaries remain significantly behind other public-sector employers in Minnesota. This ongoing disparity puts the Judicial Branch at a competitive disadvantage and threatens our ability to maintain a high-performing court system over the long term. We hope the Legislature will continue to work with us in the future to address these long-term challenges.

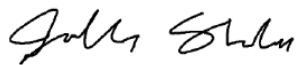
We are also thankful for the temporary funding and carry forward authority to address the rising costs and increasing deficits in the Judicial Branch's Psychological Services program, statewide Jury program, and Court Interpreter programs. The judiciary is statutorily required to provide interpreters, psychological evaluations, and jury services to ensure access to justice and uphold constitutional obligations. We also greatly appreciate the temporary funding and carry forward authority for the branch's Cyber Security Program which is vital in maintaining the security of the public, private, and sealed data involved in the judicial system.

The onetime funding for the new Justice Partner Access application and for compliance with federal digital accessibility standards represents a meaningful step forward in enhancing systemwide efficiency and ensuring equal access to court information. These investments are key to our continued efforts to promote transparency and fairness. However, both initiatives come with ongoing operational costs not currently funded in the bill. We look forward to continuing conversations on how to sustain these important efforts over the long term.

We acknowledge the state's challenging budget circumstances and understand the difficult decisions involved. While we were disappointed that the budget target provided to the House Judiciary Committee was not sufficient to fully fund the Judicial Branch's request, we commend Chair Liebling, Chair Scott, and committee members for their thoughtful and resourceful approach in allocating their budget.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch appreciates the dedication and support of the members of the Minnesota House this legislative session. We recognize our shared commitment to upholding justice and ensuring a fair and accessible legal system for all Minnesotans. We value our strong partnership with the Legislature and look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to secure the resources necessary to fulfill our constitutional responsibilities.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Shorba".

Jeffrey Shorba
State Court Administrator