



MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH
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Members of the Conference Committee on H.F. 2432,

On behalf of the judges and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on H.F. 2432, the Judiciary and Public Safety Omnibus Bill.

We appreciate the investments proposed by the House and Senate in the Judicial Branch, especially in light of the state's challenging budget situation. Given the limited resources available, we commend the committee chairs and members for their thoughtful and resourceful approach in allocating their budgets.

Nevertheless, as a co-equal branch of government, we have a duty to our employees, judges, and the people of Minnesota to secure the funding necessary to fulfill our constitutional obligations. Justice delayed is justice denied. Given the modest share of the state budget allocated to the judiciary, we respectfully urge our partners in the Executive and Legislative branches to prioritize the essential role of the courts in ensuring timely and effective justice for all Minnesotans.

Compensation, Health Insurance and Lease Increases

The proposed funding in these bills support a modest compensation increase, covers the employer share of anticipated healthcare cost increases, and addresses rising lease expenses at the Minnesota Judicial Center. These investments reflect the essential role that judges and court staff play in maintaining a fair and functioning justice system and help ensure that we do not need to divert resources from core court functions to cover basic operational costs.

We appreciate the House and Senate for including a compensation increase in their funding bills. At the same time, we must acknowledge that even with the compensation increases proposed in these bills, the Judicial Branch will continue 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.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch:

- Supports the House and Senate provisions that provide ongoing funding to cover the employer share of anticipated healthcare cost increases and fund rising lease expenses at the Minnesota Judicial Center.
- Appreciates both the House and Senate providing a compensation increase. However, **the Judicial Branch urges the Conference Committee to support the Senate position, which provides a 1.5% ongoing compensation increase for both judicial officers and staff, while the House proposal includes a onetime compensation increase for employees only.**

Pay Increases for Forensic Examiners

The proposed funding in the Senate bill would allow the Judicial Branch to increase payment rates for forensic examiners who provide mental health examinations in civil commitment and criminal proceedings to \$165 per hour. This critical funding will help the Judicial Branch continue to recruit and retain qualified examiners to deliver these vital services and uphold the Constitutional rights of Minnesotans.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch urges the Conference Committee to support the Senate position for forensic examiner pay increases.

Digital Accessibility and Justice Partner Access Funding

The House bill contains onetime funding for a new Justice Partner Access application. Both the House and Senate bills contain onetime funding for compliance with federal digital accessibility standards. 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 bills. We look forward to continuing conversations on how to sustain these important efforts over the long term.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch urges the Conference Committee to support the House and Senate positions for digital accessibility and the House position for justice partner access onetime funding.

Critical Funding for Mandated Services Deficits and Cyber Security

The House and Senate bills contain onetime funding and carry forward authority to address the rising costs and increasing deficit in the Judicial Branch Psychological Services program. The House bill provides onetime funding and carry forward authority to address the rising costs and increasing deficits in the Judicial Branch's statewide Jury program and Court Interpreter program. The judiciary is statutorily required to provide interpreters, psychological evaluations, and jury services to ensure access to justice and uphold constitutional obligations. The House bill also provides onetime 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 Judicial Branch urges the Conference Committee to support the House and Senate positions funding the deficit in the Psychological Services program. The Judicial Branch also urges the Conference Committee to support the House position funding the deficits in the statewide Jury program and Court Interpreter program and providing additional funding for the Cyber Security program through FY2029.

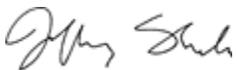
Judicial Branch Policy Priorities

The Judicial Branch supports the Judicial Branch policy provisions in both the House and Senate bills. These measures will help modernize statutory language and improve court processes for judges, staff, and court users across Minnesota. We are also especially appreciative of the inclusion of real estate provisions under the Judicial and Staff Safety and Security Act, which will help strengthen protections and improve safety for judicial officers.

The Judicial Branch urges the Conference Committee to include the policy provisions contained in both the House and Senate bills.

On behalf of the judges and staff of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, thank you for your continued support and partnership. We appreciate the hard work of the House and Senate Judiciary committees this session and look forward to working with the Legislature in the year ahead to address the long-term funding challenges facing our courts.

With gratitude,



Jeffrey Shorba
State Court Administrator