

# Minnesota Judicial State Court Salaries

PREPARED FOR THE MINNESOTA DISTRICT JUDGES ASSOCIATION

By

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### *Executive summary:*

*The last set of recommendations for Minnesota judicial salaries was written in July 2020.<sup>1</sup> That study recommended raises of 5.05% per year in the 2021-2022 biennium and 4.05% for the 2023-2024 biennium. The Legislature instead passed increases of 2.5% in July 2021, 0% in July 2022, 8% in July 2023 and 4% in July 2024. During this time, economists expect inflation to rise 18% assuming a 2.6% inflation rate for July 2024-June 2025,<sup>2</sup> meaning that the purchasing power of judicial salaries fell by 3.2%.*

*There has been a drop in the number of applicants for judicial appointments and an increase in turnover, likely due to the increased salaries for publicly serving legal professionals such as county attorneys or public defenders. A new survey of county attorney offices shows 12 county attorneys, 6 assistant county attorneys and at least 2 public defenders earn a higher wage than district court trial judges. Private sector pay gaps at the margin will draw some judges away from service. The salaries of these professionals have risen by 4.8% per year since 2018, which further pressures the supply of potential judicial appointments.*

*As a result, **we recommend judicial pay be increased by 6.9% in 2025 and 3.4% in 2026 to bring these competitive forces into better balance and to compensate for lost purchasing power over the last four years.***

### *Analysis:*

Pay for judges came under state control in 2005. Facing budgetary pressures from lower tax collections during the Great Financial Crisis of 2008, pay for judges remained constant between 2008 and 2012, while inflation deteriorated their real earnings by 6.9%. A similar pattern emerged in 2020-22 through the COVID-19 pandemic, where despite a 2.5% increase in 2021, real earnings of district court trial judges fell 9%. (See Figure 1 and Table 1 for data.)

Likewise, following a deterioration in the funding level of Minnesota pension funds, in 2013 the Legislature modified judicial retirement plans, reducing judge contributions to fund a less generous pension. This change made outside opportunities more attractive and could induce judges to resign before retirement. Most judges retire before age 70, and of the 75 judges who have retired since 2020, 6 were below age 65, accepting a lower retirement benefit than had they stayed until age 65 (for those appointed before June 30, 2013) or 66 (for those appointed after). (See table 2 for retirement patterns by age from 2018 through 2023.)

The Compensation Council in 2023, recognizing this loss and its potential impact on the ability to attract top legal talent to apply and accept judgeships, recommended a 9% increase beginning in July 2023 and an additional 6% increase in July 2024. The Legislature instead passed increases of 8% and 4%. Inflation since then has continued above expectations such that based on a reasonable estimate of inflation for the July 2024 – June 2025 period, real purchasing power of trial judges' salaries is now 3.2% below where it was in 2020, and is below the level it was in 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Kula and Kristine L. West, "Minnesota Judicial State Court Salaries," St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN, draft of July 6, 2020 prepared for MDJA. We thank Dr. West for her notes and advice.

<sup>2</sup> The 2.6% inflation rate for 2024-25 is the median CPI forecast of the Wall Street Journal's Survey of Economists, January 14, 2025.

Compared to other states, the actions taken by the Compensation Council to recommend pay raises have moved Minnesota's judicial salaries modestly. In cost-of-living adjusted terms, Minnesota ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in 2021 and 19<sup>th</sup> in 2023. See Table 3 for a full ranking of the 50 states.

The 2023 the Compensation Council recognized that a fair and adequate compensation system is an important element in ensuring that good candidates will seek and serve in these offices. The Council referenced surveys indicating that many judges were exploring other job opportunities, and private and public sector firms were recruiting judges, offering increased compensation. Testimony during the Council's hearings emphasized the challenges of attracting qualified candidates due to stagnant salaries.<sup>3</sup>

Pay is one of the most common reasons for a person to change jobs, though it is only one of many factors. When a job in the same community that pays much more becomes available, even those judges called to public service may change jobs. A recent example is former Hennepin County Chief Judge Todd Barnette, current age 58, who became Community Safety Commissioner of the City of Minneapolis in October 2023. The new position reportedly has a base salary of \$300,000.<sup>4</sup> That same month, Chief Justice Lorie Skjerven Gildea, age 62, retired from the Supreme Court. She is now in private practice at Greenberg Traurig.<sup>5</sup> According to GlassDoor, the median shareholder at Greenberg Traurig earned \$242,000 and the top of the range was \$329,000.<sup>6</sup>

Labor market data support these anecdotes. Over the 2020-23 period, salaries of lawyers in the private sector have risen by more than district judge salaries. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shown in Table 4, the top 25% of lawyers in the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington MN metropolitan statistical area earn in excess of \$209,560 annually, well above the pay for district judges of \$190,117. As noted in Tables 5 and 6, district judges earn less than several county attorneys and assistant county attorneys, as well as private sector lawyers with 10 or more years of experience.

Evidence also exists that at least two members of the Board of Public Defense earn more than district judges. The State Public Defender is paid \$226,460, set by the Board of Public Defense. The chief public defender for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District (Hennepin County) has a pay range of \$194,000 to \$221,955 according to the website *GlassDoor*. Unlike district judges, pay for public defenders in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District can be supplemented by the county.<sup>7</sup> Assistant public defenders salary scales have a maximum of \$158,500.<sup>8</sup>

Other metro areas pay less for lawyers, in part because the competition for lawyers in those communities is less as well. Yet all but Mankato show the upper quartile above \$150,000 in salary and

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<sup>3</sup> Compensation Council Recommendations, March 31, 2023.

<https://www.lrl.mn.gov/docs/2023/mandated/230799.pdf>, last view July 28, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Duxter and Cole Premo, "Judge Todd Barnette confirmed as Minneapolis' new community safety commissioner." *WCCO News*, October 19, 2023. <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/judge-toddrick-barnette-confirmed-as-minneapolis-new-community-safety-commissioner/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gtlaw.com/en/professionals/g/gildea-lorie-skjerven>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.glassdoor.com/Salary/Greenberg-Traurig-Shareholder-Salaries-EJI IE5401.0,17 KO18,29 IM911.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Minn.Stat. 611.26, Subd. 3a.

<sup>8</sup> Board of Public Defense, *Budget Review*, House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law committee presentation, Feb. 15, 2024. [https://www.leg.mn.gov/cal?type=single&mtgid=h\\_36976&d1=02/15/2024#h\\_36976](https://www.leg.mn.gov/cal?type=single&mtgid=h_36976&d1=02/15/2024#h_36976)

the top 10% receive more than a Minnesota trial judge. The data show 93% of all lawyers in Minnesota live in a metro area, and 84% of all Minnesota lawyers live in the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington MSA.<sup>9</sup> For those outside of the Twin Cities, mobility matters; a decision to apply for a vacant seat includes not only pay but also cost of living differences, family attachment to a community, etc.

Experienced judges make better decisions. Moreover, a fully staffed bench of judges reduces workload and decreases time to decision making. There has been an increase of 21% in caseload since fiscal year 2019, despite efforts to reduce backlog in major criminal cases resulting from the pandemic.<sup>10</sup>

A March 2023 survey found 61% of Minnesota district judges had moved up their planned date of retirement or resignation.<sup>11</sup> Seven of every eight judges reported an increase in workload since 2020, with 34% of those judges reporting an increase of over 5 hours per week.<sup>12</sup> Larger workloads were the most common reason cited for a change in retirement plans (23%), but almost an equal number (22%) cited “stagnation in judicial pay” as a factor.<sup>13</sup> Eleven percent cited “opportunities to earn a larger salary elsewhere.” Likewise, the same survey included 36 retired judges, 28 of whom took early retirement. Thirteen responded that they “retire[d] at an earlier age than originally intended.” Six said “stagnation of judicial pay” was a reason that contributed to their decision.<sup>14</sup>

A recent survey completed by the Minnesota County Attorneys Association (MCAA) provided results on 57 of the 87 counties in Minnesota.<sup>15</sup> Removing part-time county attorneys, the average salary of county attorneys was \$158,795. Salary is highly correlated with the logarithm of county population (a simple  $R^2 = 0.74$ ; a 10% increase in population adds about \$2200 to county attorney salaries.). Twelve of the 57 salaries were above the current pay of district judges. See Table 6 and Figure 5 for a few examples of salaries that have risen above those of district judges.

The MCAA survey also shows that top assistant county attorneys averaged \$137,743 in salary. Six of them -- Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Olmsted, Scott and Stearns counties -- earned more than Minnesota trial judges. Here too, salary was highly correlated with the logarithm of county population ( $R^2 = 0.78$ .) In February 2023, Anoka County announced the hiring of former district judge Bethany Fountain Lindberg, age 59, as chief deputy county attorney, a position for which she resigned from the bench.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that some judges seek alternative employment opportunities and that some are recruited with offers of better pay and benefits. The MDJA Survey showed 24% of surveyed judges were exploring

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<sup>9</sup> This number is imprecise since three of the six metro areas, including Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, incorporate border counties across state lines. We did not attempt to correct using county-level data. The Minnesota Judicial Branch counts 26,313 active lawyers in Minnesota. Minnesota Judicial Branch, Performance Measures, Key Results and Measures, Annual Report 2023, Sept. 2023, p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Judicial Branch, *op cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Minnesota District Judges Association Judicial Compensation Survey, March 2023, 16. Hereinafter referred to as MDJA Survey.

<sup>12</sup> MDJA Survey, 11.

<sup>13</sup> MDJA Survey, 17. Respondents could choose more than one factor.

<sup>14</sup> MDJA Survey, 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Minnesota County Attorneys Association, 2024 County Attorney Salary Survey.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Bodley, “Fountain Lindberg Appointed Chief Deputy County Attorney.” *Hometown Source*, Feb. 10, 2023. [https://www.hometownsource.com/abc\\_newspapers/community/andover/fountain-lindberg-appointed-chief-deputy-county-attorney/article\\_b8c0d434-a327-11ed-84a4-f31535182355.html](https://www.hometownsource.com/abc_newspapers/community/andover/fountain-lindberg-appointed-chief-deputy-county-attorney/article_b8c0d434-a327-11ed-84a4-f31535182355.html)

other jobs outside of the judicial branch, and that 43% had been recruited outside of the judicial branch within the last three years of the survey. Eighty-five percent of the jobs offered by recruiters paid more than earned as a judicial officer.<sup>17</sup> As noted in the 2021 Compensation Council recommendations, “The Compensation Council emphasizes the importance for salaries of the judiciary to be able to attract candidates from the private sector, as well as from the public sector.”<sup>18</sup>

Analysis of BLS data shows that the increase in salaries for lawyers (using that occupational classification code) in Minnesota has risen by 4.8% per year since 2019. Over that same period, the data in Table 1 show an increase of 3.4% per year on average for district judges. Lawyer salaries are rising faster than the inflation rate, meaning adjusting salaries of district judges only to inflation will be insufficient to maintain a competitive wage for district judges. They would instead fall further behind.

### **Recommendation:**

We base our recommendation for Minnesota judicial salaries based on the conclusions we draw from the foregoing analysis.

1. The Compensation Council **should anticipate inflation** for the period from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2027. The Wall Street Journal has surveyed 75 economists quarterly regarding a variety of economic indicators, including CPI. As of January 2025, the median forecast was for 2.66% between June 2025 and June 2026, and an annual rate of 2.40% for December 2026 versus December 2025. Failure to compensate for this inflation will put judicial salaries even further behind in terms of purchasing power, as well as private and other (non-judicial) public sector opportunities. Forecasters will update these projections between now and when the Council makes its recommendations.
2. By the beginning of the next biennium, based on past data and projections of inflation by June 30, 2025, Minnesota district judge salaries will have lost 3.2% of their purchasing power since July 2021. The Council **should restore purchasing power** by adding an additional 3.2% increase beginning July 1, 2025.
3. The Compensation Council **should recognize the tighter labor market for lawyers** that has resulted in higher private sector wages. Lawyers with 10 or more years of experience have seen increases in pay of 5.45% per year between 2020 and 2024. Such a lawyer paid the median wage in 2020 received a pay increase of 13% by becoming a district judge.<sup>19</sup> As seen in Table 4, the raise received by an experienced lawyer in 2024 upon appointment to the bench is now 6%. Similar compression has occurred for corporate counsels. It should also recognize that pay for other government workers has risen faster than for judges: the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees negotiated a 5.5% increase for all employees beginning July 1, 2023 and another 4.5% beginning July 1, 2024.<sup>20</sup> To provide a more competitive salary, the Compensation Council should **add an additional 1% per year to catch up with private sector wages**.

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<sup>17</sup> MDJA Survey, 32-34.

<sup>18</sup> Compensation Council Recommendations, March 29, 2021, at page 5.  
<https://www.lrl.mn.gov/docs/2021/mandated/210584.pdf>, last view July 26, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Kula and West, *op cit.*, p. 3.

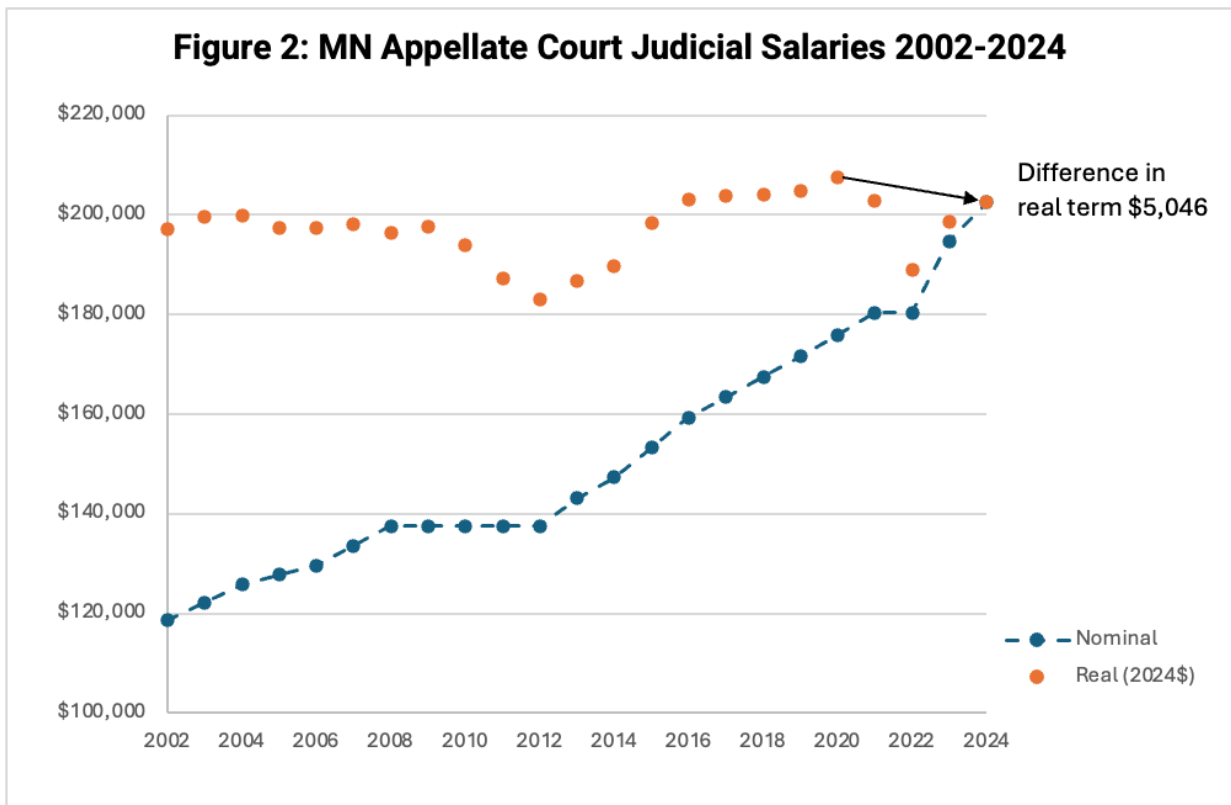
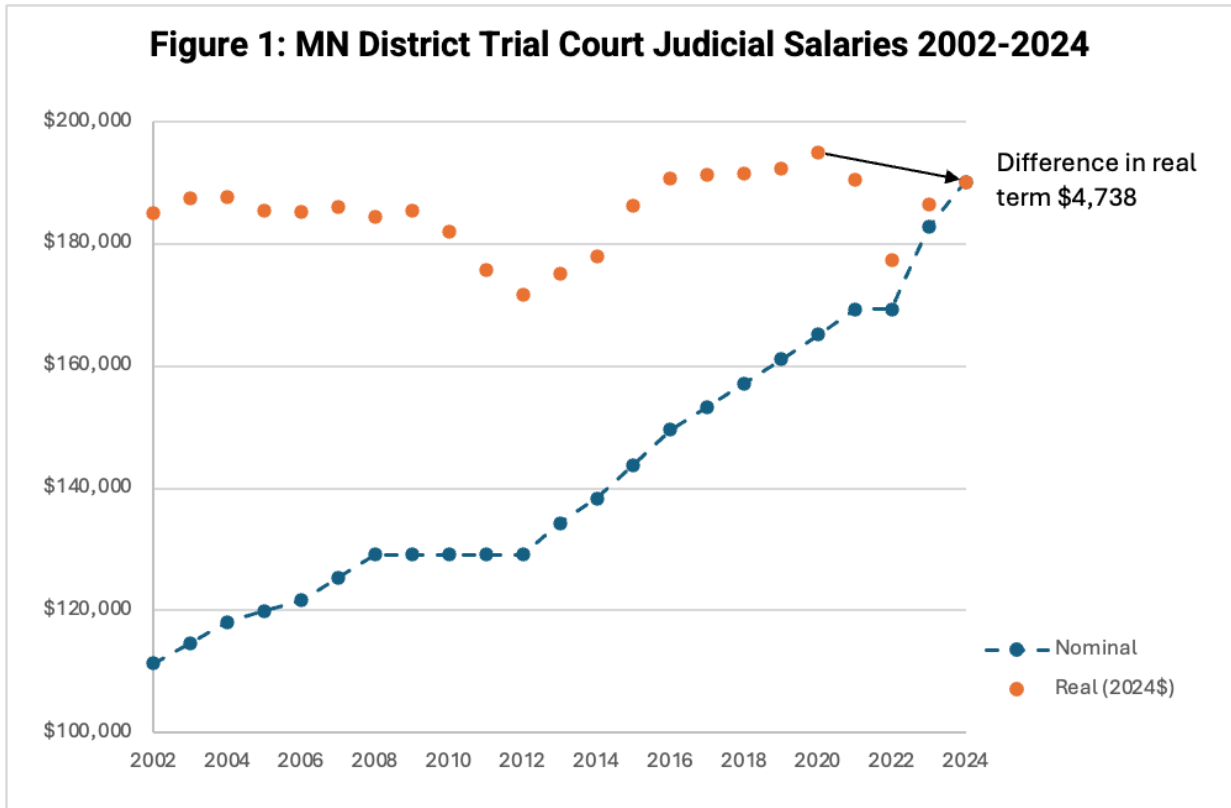
<sup>20</sup> <https://mape.org/news/mape-reaches-tentative-agreement-2023-2025-contract>

**This recommendation thus calls for an increase of 6.9% starting July 1, 2025 and an additional 3.4% increase starting in July 1, 2026.** You may see the result of this increase in Table 7. The restoration of purchasing power helps bring back the differential salary between an experienced lawyer and a district court judge towards 9%, if we assume that lawyers will receive on average 3.5% wage increases going forward. The catch-up factor allows for a slow expansion of that differential.<sup>21</sup>

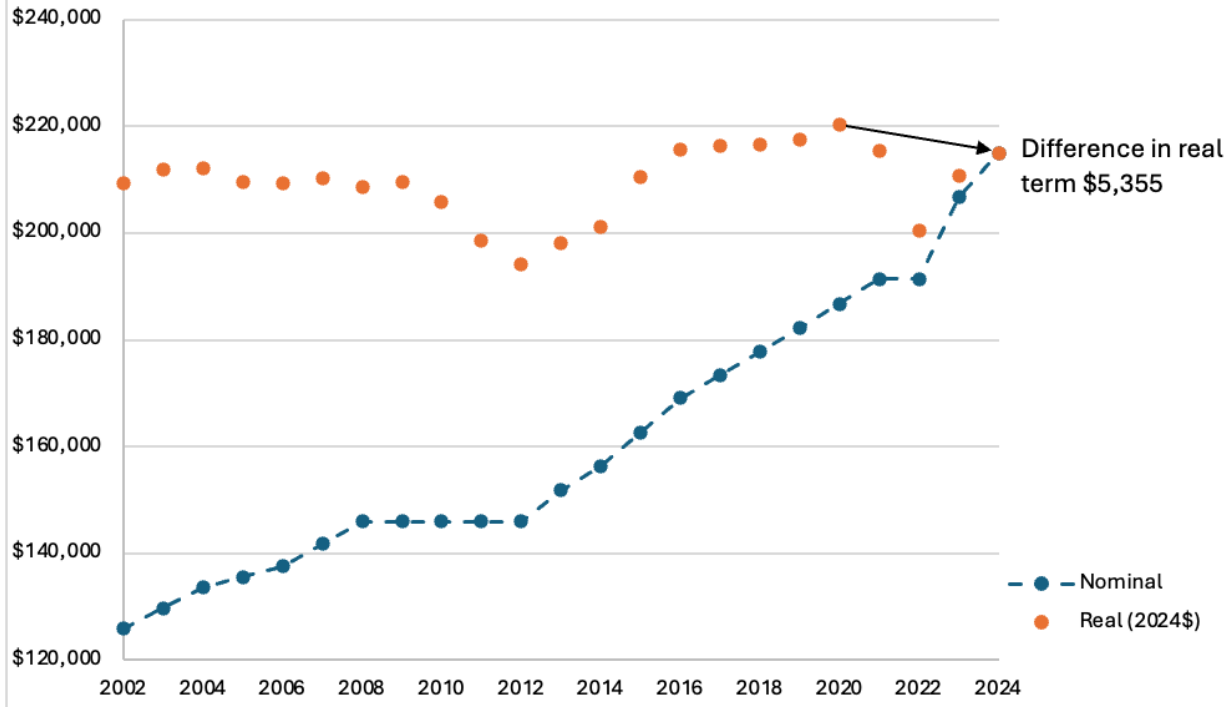
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<sup>21</sup> We recognize that the previous four years saw much higher salary increases than 3.5%, but recent reductions in the inflation rate are likely to reduce those increases. We also observed wage increase closer to 4% for corporate counsels.

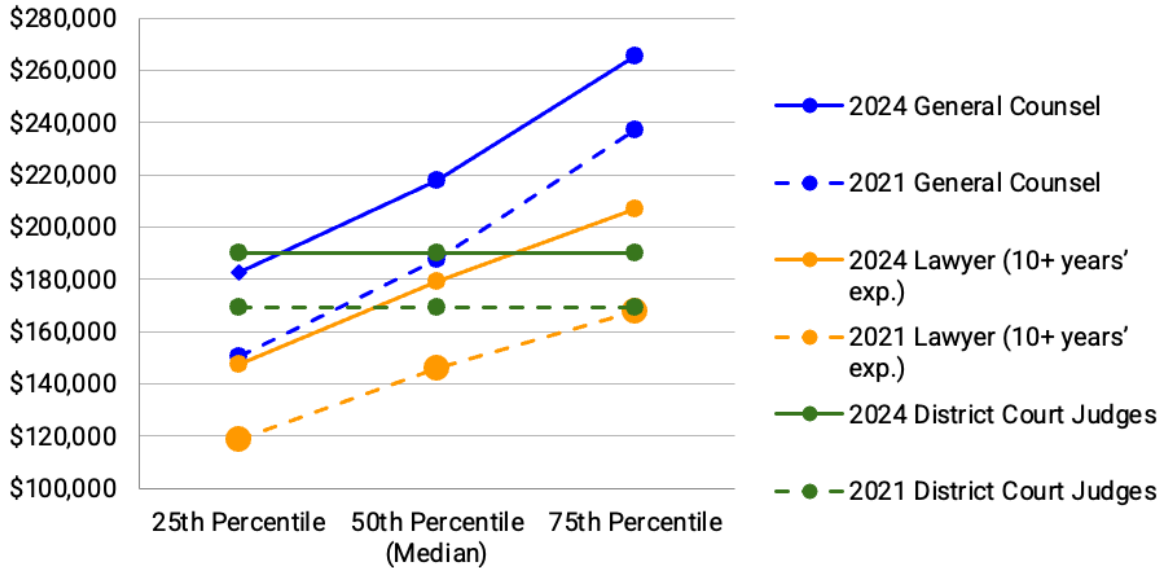
Appendix:



**Figure 3: MN Supreme Court Judicial Salaries 2002-2024**



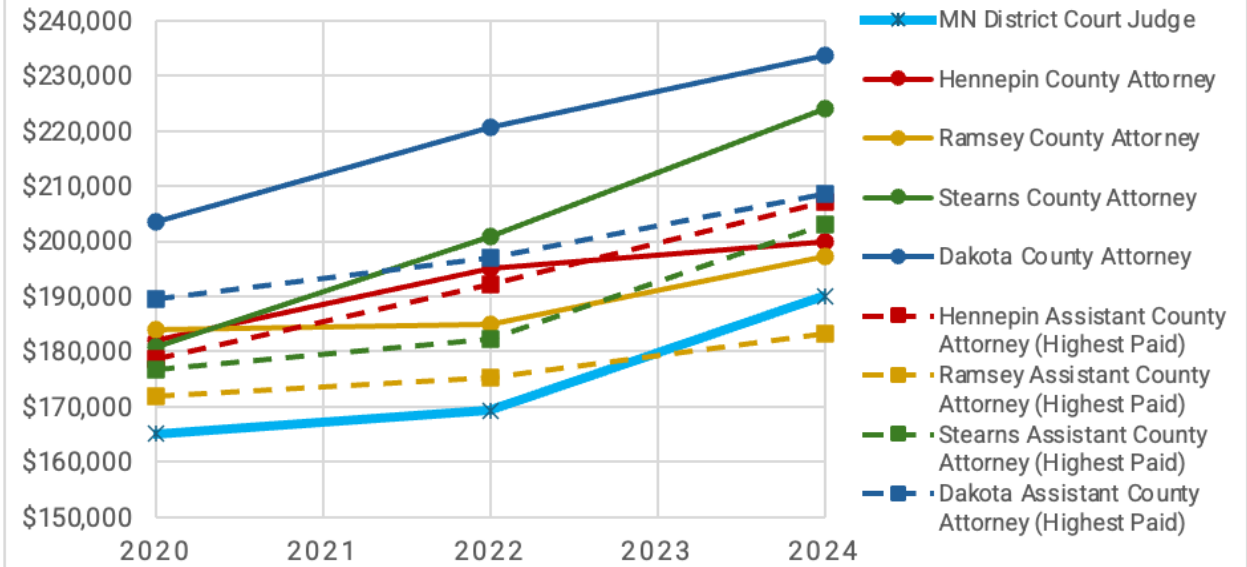
**Figure 4: Comparison of Legal Salaries by Percentile, 2021-2024**



Sources: National Robert Half Legal 2021 and 2024 Salary Guides for data on attorneys' salaries.  
 Note: The Robert Half Legal 2024 Salary Guide does not include data for the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile. Therefore, only data up to 75<sup>th</sup> percentile has been used in this chart.



**Figure 5: Comparison of Public Sector Legal Salaries, 2020-2024**



Sources: Minnesota County Attorneys Association: 2020, 2022, and 2024 County Attorney Salaries & 2020, 2022, and 2024 Assistant County Attorney Salaries.

**Table 1: Minnesota Judicial Salaries: Nominal and Real, 2002-2024****Supreme Court**

Year	Chief Justice		Associate Justice	
	Nominal	Real (2024\$)	Nominal	Real (2024\$)
2002	\$138,487	\$230,191	\$125,897	\$209,263
2003	\$142,641	\$233,073	\$129,674	\$211,884
2004	\$146,920	\$233,421	\$133,564	\$212,201
2005	\$149,124	\$230,542	\$135,567	\$209,583
2006	\$151,361	\$230,303	\$137,601	\$209,367
2007	\$155,902	\$231,264	\$141,729	\$210,240
2008	\$160,579	\$229,411	\$145,981	\$208,556
2009	\$160,579	\$230,591	\$145,981	\$209,628
2010	\$160,579	\$226,410	\$145,981	\$205,827
2011	\$160,579	\$218,554	\$145,981	\$198,685
2012	\$160,579	\$213,568	\$145,981	\$194,153
2013	\$167,002	\$217,886	\$151,820	\$198,078
2014	\$172,012	\$221,326	\$156,375	\$201,206
2015	\$178,892	\$231,621	\$162,630	\$210,566
2016	\$186,048	\$237,206	\$169,135	\$215,642
2017	\$190,699	\$237,959	\$173,363	\$216,326
2018	\$195,466	\$238,202	\$177,697	\$216,548
2019	\$200,353	\$239,143	\$182,139	\$217,402
2020	\$205,361	\$242,319	\$186,692	\$220,290

2021	\$210,496	\$236,910	\$191,359	\$215,372
2022	\$210,496	\$220,481	\$191,359	\$200,437
2023	\$227,336	\$231,847	\$206,668	\$210,769
2024	\$236,429	\$236,429	\$214,935	\$214,935

**Table 1, continued: Minnesota Judicial Salaries: Nominal and Real, 2002-2024**

**Court of Appeals**

Year	Chief Judge		Judges	
	Nominal	Real (2024\$)	Nominal	Real (2024\$)
2002	\$124,558	\$207,039	\$118,627	\$197,181
2003	\$128,295	\$209,631	\$122,186	\$199,650
2004	\$132,144	\$209,945	\$125,852	\$199,948
2005	\$134,126	\$207,356	\$127,740	\$197,483
2006	\$136,138	\$207,141	\$129,656	\$197,278
2007	\$140,222	\$208,004	\$133,546	\$198,101
2008	\$144,429	\$206,339	\$137,552	\$196,514
2009	\$144,429	\$207,400	\$137,552	\$197,524
2010	\$144,429	\$203,639	\$137,552	\$193,943
2011	\$144,429	\$196,573	\$137,552	\$187,213
2012	\$144,429	\$192,089	\$137,552	\$182,943
2013	\$150,206	\$195,973	\$143,064	\$186,655
2014	\$154,712	\$199,066	\$147,346	\$189,588
2015	\$160,900	\$208,326	\$153,240	\$198,408

2016	\$167,336	\$213,348	\$159,370	\$203,192
2017	\$171,519	\$214,025	\$163,354	\$203,837
2018	\$175,807	\$214,245	\$167,438	\$204,046
2019	\$180,202	\$215,090	\$171,624	\$204,851
2020	\$184,707	\$217,948	\$175,915	\$207,574
2021	\$189,325	\$213,082	\$180,313	\$202,939
2022	\$189,325	\$198,306	\$180,313	\$188,867
2023	\$204,471	\$208,528	\$194,738	\$198,602
2024	\$212,650	\$212,650	\$202,528	\$202,528

**Table 1, continued: Minnesota Judicial Salaries: Nominal and Real, 2002-2024**

**Trial Court**

Year	Chief Judge		Judges	
	Nominal	Real (2024\$)	Nominal	Real (2024\$)
2002	\$116,926	\$194,353	\$111,359	\$185,099
2003	\$120,434	\$196,786	\$114,700	\$187,417
2004	\$124,047	\$197,081	\$118,141	\$187,698
2005	\$125,908	\$194,651	\$119,913	\$185,383
2006	\$127,797	\$194,449	\$121,712	\$185,191
2007	\$131,631	\$195,260	\$125,363	\$185,962
2008	\$135,580	\$193,696	\$129,124	\$184,473
2009	\$135,580	\$194,692	\$129,124	\$185,422
2010	\$135,580	\$191,162	\$129,124	\$182,060

2011	\$135,580	\$184,529	\$129,124	\$175,742
2012	\$135,580	\$180,320	\$129,124	\$171,733
2013	\$141,003	\$183,966	\$134,289	\$175,206
2014	\$145,233	\$186,869	\$138,318	\$177,972
2015	\$151,042	\$195,563	\$143,851	\$186,252
2016	\$157,084	\$200,277	\$149,605	\$190,742
2017	\$161,011	\$200,913	\$153,345	\$191,347
2018	\$165,036	\$201,119	\$157,179	\$191,544
2019	\$169,162	\$201,913	\$161,108	\$192,299
2020	\$173,391	\$204,596	\$165,136	\$194,855
2021	\$177,726	\$200,028	\$169,264	\$190,504
2022	\$177,726	\$186,157	\$169,264	\$177,293
2023	\$191,944	\$195,752	\$182,805	\$186,432
2024	\$199,622	\$199,622	\$190,117	\$190,117
<p>Note: Real salaries are adjusted to May 2024 dollars using the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U for the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minn.-Wis metropolitan region (298.528).</p>				

**Table 2: Age Distribution of New Retirees Over Time**

<b>Year</b>	<b>55-59</b>	<b>60-64</b>	<b>65-69</b>	<b>70-74</b>	<b>75-79</b>	<b>80-84</b>	<b>85-89</b>	<b>90+</b>
<b>2018</b>	0	3	14	10	0	0	0	0
<b>2019</b>	1	2	17	7	0	0	0	0
<b>2020</b>	0	1	12	3	0	0	0	0
<b>2021</b>	0	0	11	5	0	0	0	0
<b>2022</b>	0	4	15	7	0	0	0	0
<b>2023</b>	0	1	11	5	0	0	0	0

Source: Minnesota State Retirement System Judges Retirement Fund Actuarial Valuation Reports, 2018-2023.

**Table 3: Complete cost of living adjusted (COLA) trial court judge salary rankings, 2023**

<b>2023 COLA adjusted rank</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>2023 COLA district trial court judge salary</b>	<b>% (real) change for MN to reach rank</b>	<b>Difference in rank from 2021 to 2023</b>
<i>1</i>	Illinois	\$234,766	31.55%	0
<i>2</i>	Tennessee	\$221,720	24.24%	0
<i>3</i>	Pennsylvania	\$215,397	20.69%	-2
<i>4</i>	South Carolina	\$215,202	20.59%	1
<i>5</i>	Arkansas	\$212,966	19.33%	1
<i>6</i>	Virginia	\$202,631	13.54%	-2
<i>7</i>	Georgia	\$197,221	10.51%	0
<i>8</i>	Utah	\$197,001	10.39%	-6
<i>9</i>	Nebraska	\$194,596	9.04%	-1

10	Washington	\$189,265	6.05%	-2
11	Michigan	\$188,836	5.81%	-2
12	Florida	\$188,661	5.71%	-9
13	New York	\$187,863	5.27%	7
14	Missouri	\$187,432	5.03%	5
15	Delaware	\$187,090	4.83%	4
16	Indiana	\$186,505	4.51%	-2
17	Louisiana	\$179,869	0.79%	2
18	Mississippi	\$178,576	0.06%	1
19	<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>\$178,464</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>-1</b>
20	California	\$176,771	-0.95%	1
21	Arizona	\$175,659	-1.57%	-10
22	South Dakota	\$174,930	-1.98%	-12
23	Ohio	\$174,201	-2.39%	7
24	Rhode Island	\$174,078	-2.46%	-11
25	Colorado	\$173,761	-2.64%	2
26	North Carolina	\$173,276	-2.91%	-2
27	New Mexico	\$172,439	-3.38%	-17
28	Wisconsin	\$170,741	-4.33%	-2
29	New Jersey	\$168,268	-5.71%	7
30	Oklahoma	\$168,097	-5.81%	4
31	Kentucky	\$164,449	-7.85%	-7
32	Alabama	\$162,755	-8.80%	3
33	Iowa	\$161,716	-9.38%	8

34	Texas	\$159,507	-10.62%	10
35	Massachusetts	\$157,006	-12.02%	-5
36	Connecticut	\$154,233	-13.58%	-1
37	Maryland	\$153,529	-13.97%	-9
38	New Hampshire	\$153,027	-14.25%	-4
39	District of Columbia	\$152,522	-14.54%	-10
40	North Dakota	\$152,348	-14.63%	1
41	Wyoming	\$152,006	-14.83%	14
42	Kansas	\$151,648	-15.03%	-5
43	Idaho	\$151,585	-15.06%	10
44	Alaska	\$151,003	-15.39%	8
45	Vermont	\$150,593	-15.62%	2
46	Oregon	\$146,458	-17.93%	-4
47	West Virginia	\$145,167	-18.66%	6
48	Hawaii	\$143,793	-19.43%	3
49	Montana	\$143,266	-19.72%	1
50	Nevada	\$142,640	-20.07%	18
51	Maine	\$124,564	-30.20%	0

Source: National Center for State Courts, “Survey of Judicial Salaries,” Vol 49, No. 1, 2024 and Vol 47, No 1, 2022.

Note: The last column shows the extent to which the rank of each state has increased or decreased since 2021. A negative value represents an improved rank. Minnesota moved from 20<sup>th</sup> in the rankings in 2021 to 19<sup>th</sup> in 2023, so this column contains a -1 to represent its improving position compared to other states.



**Table 4. Lawyer Salaries 2023 (Standard Occupation Code 23.1011)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Annual Low (10%)</b>	<b>Annual Lower Quartile (25%)</b>	<b>Annual Median (50%)</b>	<b>Annual Upper Quartile (75%)</b>	<b>Annual High (90%)</b>
Duluth, MN-WI	280	\$66,810	\$83,640	\$110,200	\$151,030	\$204,530
Fargo, ND-MN	400	\$79,120	\$89,430	\$106,570	\$167,320	\$205,100
Mankato-North Mankato, MN	120	\$70,120	\$80,000	\$97,660	\$140,810	\$180,490
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	9,740	\$81,680	\$104,070	\$156,560	\$209,560	\$239,200 +
Rochester, MN	220	\$69,870	\$83,400	\$108,310	\$157,100	\$233,650
St. Cloud, MN	250	\$71,030	\$80,270	\$104,890	\$154,880	\$191,150
MEMO: STATE	11,560	\$78,650	\$101,320	\$149,990	\$197,030	\$239,200 +

Note: Top 10% salary for Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI MSA is censored.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/oes/>.

**Table 5: Minnesota District Trial Court Judge salaries relative to median salaries of Minneapolis private sector lawyers with various years of experience, 2024**

	<b>Median 2024 Salary</b>	<b>% Increase Over District Court Judge Salary</b>
General Counsel	\$217,745	15%
In-House Counsel (10+ years of experience)	\$186,715	-2%
Law Firm (10+ years of experience)	\$178,958	-6%
Law Firm (4-9 years of experience)	\$142,845	-25%
In-House Corporate Attorney (4-9 years of experience)	\$148,195	-22%
District Court Judge	\$190,117	--

Source: National Robert Half Legal 2024 Salary Guide.

Note: The data are adjusted for Minneapolis and do not account for bonuses, incentives, benefits, or retirement packages.

**Table 6: Minnesota District Court Judge Salaries relative to metropolitan area lead county attorneys and senior assistant county attorneys, 2024**

	County Attorney		Highest Paid Assistant County Attorney	
	2024 Salary	% Increase Over District Court Judge Salary	2024 Salary	% Increase Over District Court Judge Salary
<b>Hennepin County</b>	\$199,942	5%	\$207,104	9%
<b>Ramsey County</b>	\$197,284	4%	\$183,309	-4%
<b>Stearns County</b>	\$223,996	18%	\$203,171	7%
<b>Dakota County</b>	\$233,653	23%	\$208,619	10%
<i>Four County Average</i>	\$213,719	12%	\$200,551	5%
<b>District Court Judge</b>	\$190,117	--	--	--

Sources: Minnesota County Attorneys Association 2024 County Attorney Salaries & 2024 Assistant County Attorney Salaries.

**Table 7. Recommended Judicial Salaries, 2025-26**

	As of 7/1/24	Recommend 7/1/25	Recommend 7/1/26
<b>Chief Justice, Supreme Court</b>	\$236,249	\$252,550	\$261,137
<b>Assoc. Justice, Supreme Court</b>	\$214,935	\$229,766	\$237,578
<b>Chief Judge, Court of Appeals</b>	\$212,650	\$227,323	\$235,052
<b>Judge, Court of Appeals</b>	\$202,528	\$216,502	\$223,864
<b>Chief Judge, Trial Court</b>	\$199,622	\$213,396	\$220,651
<b>Judge, Trial Court</b>	\$190,117	\$203,235	\$210,145
<b>Lawyer, 10+ years (projected 3%/yr)</b>	\$178,958	\$185,222	\$191,704
<b>Differential from lawyer to trial court</b>	6.24%	9.73%	9.62%

Note: These salaries represent 6.9% increase in 2025 and 3.4% increase in 2026.

**A note about the authors:**

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*Dr. King Banaian* is a professor in the Department of Economics and directs the Center for Policy Research and Community Engagement at St. Cloud State University. He served as dean of the former School of Public Affairs 2014-23. He holds the Ph.D. in economics from the Claremont Graduate School. He has authored 2 books and over 50 articles discussing monetary policy and political economy. A former Minnesota state representative from St. Cloud, Dr. Banaian is president of the St. Cloud Economic Development Authority and a member of the St. Cloud Regional Airport Authority board for the City of St. Cloud.