

Supplemental Information to Compensation Council  
March 20, 2025

Dear Members of the Compensation Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you last week. As a follow up from my testimony, I would like to provide you with further information regarding my judicial salary recommendations and answers to your questions.

I testified that salaries for district court judges should be increased from \$190,117 to \$200,000, and appellate court salaries should be increased from \$202,258 to \$250,000. After further analysis of judicial compensation across the country and the legal market locally, I believe my more expansive recommendations below will greatly alleviate the recruiting concerns I discussed and help ensure that we maintain a judiciary of highly qualified judges from a diversity of practice backgrounds.

Proposed salaries for Minnesota Judicial Branch judges:

- **District Court Judge:** \$200,000
- **Court of Appeals Judge:** \$225,000
- **Supreme Court Associate Justice:** \$250,000
- **Supreme Court Chief Justice:** \$277,000

Currently, Minnesota’s judicial salaries range from twenty-third to twenty-seventh in the nation, depending on the level of the court. With this proposed increase, Minnesota’s district court salaries would be commensurate with state district courts across the nation. Appellate court judges would be slightly higher than the national average, but more in line with federal judicial salaries and the local legal market. For example, starting salaries for first-year associates at large metro law firms range from \$180,000 - \$225,000 per year and increase exponentially over the course of their careers. On average, judges appointed by Governor Walz to the metro districts had 20 years of practice experience prior to their appointment, meaning many potential applicants would need to take a substantial pay cut to pursue the bench at this point in their careers.

Given the volume of cases handled by our state court judges, plus the growing impact of state appellate court decisions with the recent shift in federal jurisprudence, I strongly recommend increasing judicial salaries to be more competitive and in line with federal judicial salaries. For reference, below is a chart highlighting Minnesota’s judicial salaries compared to the rest of the country, as well as the federal judiciary:

Position	Minnesota Court Salaries	Lowest State Court Salaries	Average State Court Salaries	Highest State Court Salaries	Federal Court Salaries
District Court	\$190,117	\$138,600 (WV)	\$190,838	\$246,099 (IL)	\$247,400
Court of Appeals	\$202,258	\$142,500 (WV)	\$203,084	\$280,052 (CA)	\$262,300
Supreme Court Associate Justice	\$214,650	\$149,600 (WV)	\$ 212,137	\$298,721 (CA)	\$303,600
Supreme Court Chief Justice	\$236,429	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$317,500

As to the questions you asked during the meeting, I have provided responses below:

**1. Practice Backgrounds:**

- a. Below are statistics regarding the practice background categories of applicants for district court vacancies since the Governor took office in 2019:

**i. Overall:**

1. Private Practice: 35.69%
2. Prosecutor: 31.12%
3. Public Defender: 12.11%
4. GOV – In House:<sup>1</sup> 3.17%
5. Public – Civil:<sup>2</sup> 5.58%
6. Other:<sup>3</sup> 12.33%

**ii. Metro Applicants (first, second, fourth, and tenth judicial districts):**

1. Private Practice: 38.36%
2. Prosecutor: 27.42%
3. Public Defender: 11.37%
4. GOV – In House: 3.59%
5. Public – Civil: 5.65%
6. Other: 13.61%

**iii. Greater Minnesota Applicants (third, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth judicial districts)**

1. Private Practice: 25.63%
2. Prosecutor: 45.08%
3. Public Defender: 14.88%
4. GOV – In House: 1.60%
5. Public – Civil: 5.26%
6. Other: 7.55%

**2. Salaries of judges before appointment:**

- a. Salaries prior to appointment is not data that is collected as part of the selection process. While we do track the practice backgrounds of judges before they are appointed, even within those broad categories, salaries can vary greatly depending on the nature of their practice and where in the state they are practicing.

**3. State judicial salaries vs. federal judicial salaries:**

- a. The federal courts' structure is like Minnesota's and most other states across the country, where there is a district court, an intermediate appellate court, and a supreme court. At the supreme court and district court level, not a single state pays their judges more than what a federal judge serving on a similar court would make. At the intermediate court level, Illinois and California pay their judges around \$4,000 and \$18,000 more respectively than federal judges at a similar level.

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<sup>1</sup> GOV – In House includes judges who served as legal counsel for federal, state, or local government entities.

<sup>2</sup> Public – Civil includes judges who worked in a state or local public law office in a non-prosecutorial position.

<sup>3</sup> Other includes judges who served as judicial officers, professors, elected officials, etc.

- b. Our proposed salaries would follow the practice set by most other states and pay our state court judges less than federal judges but still a competitive wage.

Finally, I would like to provide you with a summary of the information that I provided you during my testimony:

- In 2024, Governor Walz made a total of 33 appointments to the Judicial Branch: 29 district court, 2 Court of Appeals, and 2 Supreme Court.
- For district court vacancies, the commission reviewed 262 judicial applications, interviewed 120 candidates, and forwarded 70 finalists to the Governor for vacancies in all ten judicial districts. This is the most district court vacancies in a year since Governor Walz took office in 2019. For comparison, the commission historically has on average 17 district court vacancies per year.
- For metro<sup>4</sup> vacancies in 2024, the commission received on average 22 applications per round of applications,<sup>5</sup> compared to 11 for Greater Minnesota<sup>6</sup> vacancies. Historically, the commission has received on average 20 applications for metro vacancies and 9 applications for vacancies in Greater Minnesota.
- Here is a breakdown of the average number of applicants per round of applications by judicial district in 2024: First - 14, Second – 23, Third – 12, Fourth – 25, Fifth – 13, Sixth – 7, Seventh – 14, Eighth – 7, Ninth – 12, and Tenth – 25.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional information regarding the judicial selection process or the work of the commission.

Sincerely,

Erin Sindberg Porter  
Chair, Commission on Judicial Selection

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<sup>4</sup> Metro judicial districts include the first, second, fourth, and tenth districts.

<sup>5</sup> Rounds of applications may include a single vacancy or multiple vacancies depending on how many vacancies are certified by the Supreme Court at the same time. A candidate may submit one application to be considered for multiple vacancies.

<sup>6</sup> Greater Minnesota judicial districts include the third, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth districts.