

Background

SUMMARY

District courts in Minnesota's ten judicial districts are the state's trial courts, and they have original jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases. Within each district, judges elect a chief judge who has general administrative authority there. Attorneys, law enforcement officers, and probation personnel are generally independent from the courts, but their actions directly affect court operations.

This chapter provides background information on Minnesota's district courts. It addresses the following questions:

- **How are Minnesota's district courts organized?**
- **What are the different roles played by district judges, chief judges, the Supreme Court, and various organizations related to the judiciary?**
- **How do the roles of others, such as law enforcement officers, prosecutors, public defenders, and probation personnel, affect the courts?**

To answer these questions, we examined *Minnesota Statutes*, *Court Rules*, and other materials pertaining to Minnesota's District Courts. We interviewed chief judges and district administrators around the state, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the State Court Administrator. We also observed the monthly meetings of the Conference of Chief Judges. To better understand the role of others involved with district courts, we interviewed representatives of several agencies that affect the work of the courts, including the heads of probation offices in four counties.

STRUCTURE OF MINNESOTA'S DISTRICT COURTS

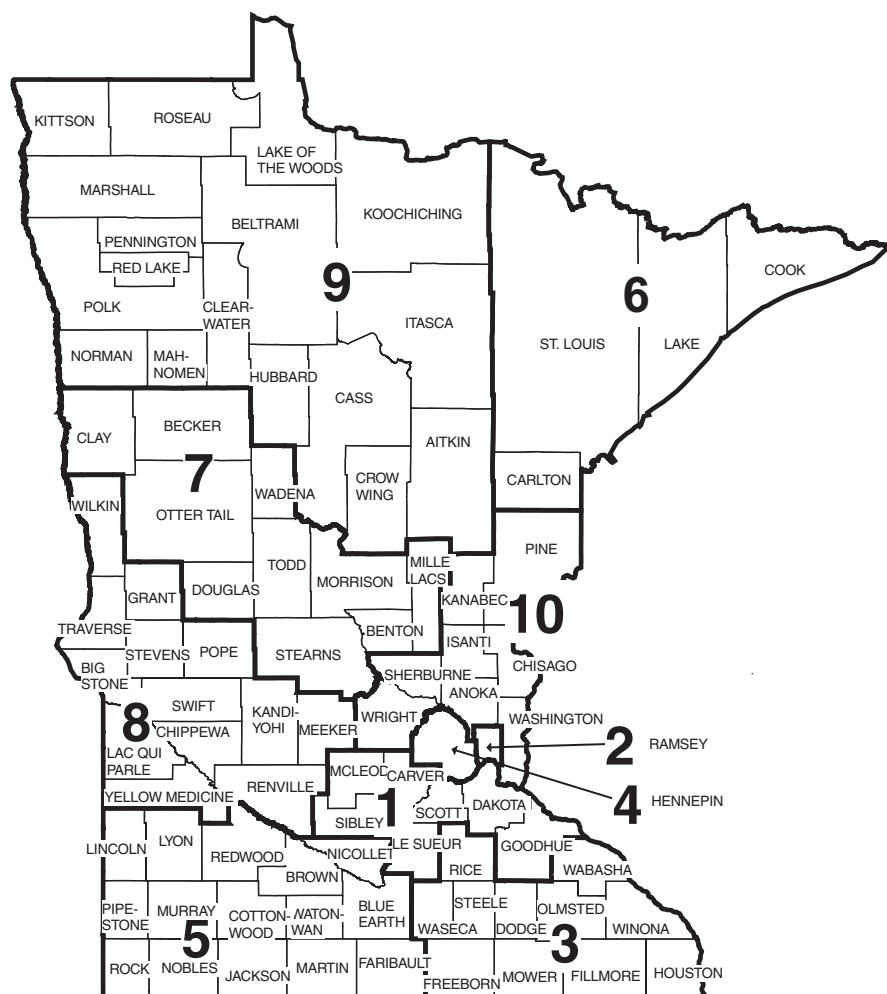
Minnesota has ten judicial districts. District boundaries follow county lines and serve as election districts for the judges. Hennepin and Ramsey counties each constitute their own judicial districts, and the remaining eight districts contain from 4 to 17 counties. State statutes specify the configuration of the districts, but

Minnesota's district courts are trial courts and have original jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases.

the Supreme Court has authority to alter district boundaries, with the exception of the Second (Ramsey County) and Fourth (Hennepin County) districts.¹ Figure 1.1 displays the ten districts and the counties each comprises.

According to Minnesota's State Constitution, district courts have original jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases.² This means that cases of all types begin in district courts.

Figure 1.1: Minnesota Judicial Districts, 2000



SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor.

¹ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §2.722, subd. 1-2. The Supreme Court may alter judicial district boundaries only with the consent of a majority of the chief judges.

² *Minn. Const.*, art. VI, sec. 3.

Each of the ten judicial districts has a district administrator, and each county has a court administrator.

Each of the ten judicial districts has a district administrator appointed by the chief judge, with the advice of the district's judges and subject to the approval of the Supreme Court.³ District administrators manage the administrative affairs of the judicial district, including budgeting and personnel management. When judges in the district meet, the district administrator serves as secretary. Many district administrators with whom we spoke said they often act as a liaison between judges and others outside the judiciary.

Within a judicial district, each county has a clerk of court, known as the court administrator.⁴ St. Louis County is unique in that it has a court administrator and two deputy court administrators, one for each courthouse in Duluth, Virginia, and Hibbing.⁵ Court administrators help judges in processing court cases, set calendars of cases, and assist in case management, among other duties.

“Unified” Trial Courts

Around the country, each state's court system is structured differently, making comparisons difficult. Most states have several layers of courts, with each layer hearing certain types of cases. For example, many states have limited jurisdiction courts that hear only misdemeanors. By contrast, Minnesota is one of nine states in which judges hear all cases, civil and criminal, regardless of the type of crime or offense.⁶ These states are said to have “unified” courts.

A pure “unified” court would be highly centralized, with statewide administration, rulemaking, budgeting, funding, and consolidated trial courts. No state meets this definition completely. Minnesota comes close, as the rest of this study describes, but within Minnesota there are many differences among judicial districts in case processing and relations with other criminal justice agencies. As shown in the chapters that follow, practices vary even within districts.

OTHER COURTS IN MINNESOTA

In addition to the district courts, Minnesota has a Court of Appeals and Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals has 15 judges and a chief judge. Its jurisdiction includes hearing appeals of final decisions from district courts, with two exceptions (heard instead by the Supreme Court): (1) legislative or statewide election contests and (2) first-degree murder convictions.⁷

³ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.68, subd. 1.

⁴ In the Second District (Ramsey County) and the Fourth District (Hennepin County), the district administrator is also the court administrator.

⁵ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.44.

⁶ Brian Ostrom and Neal Kauder, eds., *Examining the Work of State Courts, 1998* (National Center for State Courts, 1999), 12. Other states said to be unified are: Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The District of Columbia and Puerto Rico also have unified court systems. As explained in more detail later, caution must be exercised in comparing even the states with unified courts because of many differences among them.

⁷ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §480A.06, subd. 1. Conciliation court appeals are heard as new cases in district courts.

The state Supreme Court has six justices and a Chief Justice. It hears appeals of cases but also hears certain original actions prescribed by law. Minnesota's Supreme Court has authority to set rules of practice that govern procedures followed in all civil and criminal cases. The Supreme Court also has authority over certain aspects of the district courts, as is explained later in this chapter.

Executive Branch Courts

Outside the judicial branch, Minnesota has two statutory courts that are independent executive-branch agencies. One is the Tax Court, consisting of three judges with jurisdiction over state tax law cases.⁸ The second is the Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals. Five judges serve on this court and hear cases arising under Minnesota's workers' compensation laws.⁹ Unlike district courts, judges on these two courts are not elected; the Governor appoints them with Senate consent. The two courts have statewide jurisdiction, and appeals of their decisions go directly to the Supreme Court.

Minnesota's executive branch also has an Office of Administrative Hearings that employs administrative law judges to preside over rulemaking hearings and "contested cases" (which typically involve a dispute between a citizen and a state agency).¹⁰ In addition, compensation judges in the office hear cases involving workers' compensation benefits. A chief administrative law judge, appointed by the Governor with the Senate's consent, employs the administrative law judges and compensation judges.

Prior to 1999, the Office of Administrative Hearings had statutory authority to conduct child support hearings, which was intended as a means to expedite the enforcement of child support orders. A Supreme Court decision that year, however, said that permitting the Office of Administrative Hearings this authority infringed on the district courts' original jurisdiction, which includes family law cases.¹¹ According to the ruling, child support decisions by administrative law judges were not subject to district court review and, in some cases, they modified child support orders issued by district courts. In the Supreme Court's judgment, this violated the separation of powers doctrine in the state Constitution, rendering the statute unconstitutional. The ruling removed authority for child support cases from the Office of Administrative Hearings, and child support magistrates, appointed by district court chief judges, now have this duty.

Minnesota currently has 268 authorized district judge positions.

JUDGES

Currently, Minnesota has 268 authorized district court judge positions, although not all have been filled to date. In 1999, the Legislature approved the addition of

⁸ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §271.01, subd. 1, 5.

⁹ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §175A.01, subd. 1, 5.

¹⁰ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §14.48.

¹¹ *Holmberg v. Holmberg*, 588 N.W.2d 720, 721 (Minn. 1999).

The current complement of judges includes 13 positions approved by the 1999 Legislature.

13 new judge positions for the 2000-01 biennium.¹² According to law, the last of the new positions is to start January 1, 2001.

Beyond their trial court functions, judges have administrative obligations. A majority of a district's judges appoints a court administrator for each county in the district, who serves at the pleasure of the judges.¹³ Judges also appoint law clerks, who serve at the pleasure of the appointing judges.¹⁴ They may also be involved in hiring and supervising their court reporters. Some administrative authority varies by district. For instance, judges in the Second and Fourth Judicial Districts (Ramsey and Hennepin counties) have authority to appoint referees to serve in conciliation court.¹⁵

Judges also have continuing legal education requirements. The Supreme Court's personnel policy requires district judges to obtain 45 hours of continuing education every three years. District judges must also attend "judicial college" once every term of office, and they are required each term to tour one institution to which they sentence individuals. New judges attend a one-week orientation and have a mentor relationship with a judge from their district.

According to the state Constitution, district judges serve six-year terms.¹⁶ Although district judges are elected officials, when vacancies occur, or when judges retire, the Governor appoints judges until successors are elected. State statutes prescribe mandatory retirement for district judges upon reaching age 70.¹⁷

Quasi-Judicial Positions

In addition to judges, Minnesota has a limited number of appointive quasi-judicial positions, including judicial officers, child support magistrates, referees, and hearing officers, that function similarly to judges in some ways but are limited in others. Judicial officers are attorneys who are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of a district's chief judge. Although the judicial officer position has been phased out around much of the state, St. Louis County has a judicial officer who performs all the functions of a district court judge.¹⁸ Since 1999, chief judges have had authority to appoint magistrates who serve as judicial officers working solely on child-support cases.¹⁹ The Legislature established the child support magistrate positions following the Supreme Court ruling mentioned earlier that removed the authority of the Office of Administrative Hearings to conduct child support cases.

¹² *Minn. Laws* (1999) ch. 216, art. 1, sec. 4.

¹³ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §485.01 and *Minn. Const.*, art. VI, sec. 13.

¹⁴ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.545, subd. 1, 4.

¹⁵ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §491A.03, subd. 1.

¹⁶ *Minn. Const.*, art. VI, sec. 7.

¹⁷ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §490.121, subd. 12.

¹⁸ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §487.08, subd. 1, 2, and 5.

¹⁹ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.702, subd. 3. The Supreme Court confirms appointments of child-support magistrates.

Referees are attorneys who are appointed by chief judges and serve at the pleasure of the district judges. Referees are used in many capacities. For instance, the 13 referees in Hennepin County hear juvenile and family cases and also serve in housing court, drug court, and probate/mental health court. However, a district court judge has to review and sign referees' decisions, and the parties can appeal referee decisions to a district court judge.²⁰ Only the Second and Fourth Judicial Districts (Ramsey and Hennepin counties) have referees.

Administrative hearing officers are available in the Second District (Ramsey County) and Fourth District (Hennepin County) to hear traffic-related matters short of a trial. Hearing officers are county employees appointed by district court administrators. They have authority to reduce or forgive traffic-ticket fines. When persons with a traffic ticket do not deny the offense but have special circumstances they believe ought to be heard, they may bring them to a hearing officer. On the other hand, persons who deny committing the traffic offense go to trial with a judge.



A hearing officer in the Fourth Judicial District (Hennepin County) hears a traffic case.

Chief judges have general administrative authority over courts in their district, including authority to assign judges.

CHIEF JUDGES

Judges in each of the judicial districts elect a chief judge and assistant chief judge every two years. Chief judges have general administrative authority over the courts within the district, including authority to assign judges to hear any case in the district.²¹ As described in Chapter 5, the means by which chief judges make assignments varies considerably. When a motion is made to remove a judge from

²⁰ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.70, subd. 7.

²¹ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.69, subd. 3.

a case or when a judge must recuse him or herself from hearing a case, the chief judge in most districts assigns another judge to the case.

Administrative responsibilities of chief judges include general oversight of district budgets, personnel supervision for the court and district administrators, and adoption of districtwide rules or procedures. Chief judges may spend time orienting new judges or may appoint another judge to act as mentor for a new judge. Many chief judges said they work with their district administrator to oversee the district's adherence to time guidelines for disposing of cases. They also monitor the workload in the district and attempt to balance it among the judges.

During interviews, most chief judges spoke about their role as liaison between the courts and the broader community. For instance, media representatives often view the chief judge as spokesperson for the district and contact the chief judge about local court issues. Within a given county, the chief judge may be the primary representative before the county board on issues such as facilities or courtroom security. Plus, several chief judges view part of their role to provide outreach to district residents through various forums, such as civic group meetings and school convocations.

In addition to hearing cases, chief judges oversee district budgets and certain personnel and serve as liaisons with the public.

Chief judges have other statutory obligations. They are required to convene a conference at least semiannually of all judges in the district to consider administrative business.²² Many chief judges told us they held quarterly meetings, known as “bench meetings,” with the judges in their district.

Responsibility for personnel appointments and supervision rests with chief judges. As mentioned earlier, chief judges appoint child-support magistrates and district administrators. For judicial districts with referees, the chief judge has authority to appoint referees and holds administrative authority over them.²³ Chief judges also appoint members to charter commissions in cities that wish to frame a charter spelling out their rules of governance.²⁴

Chief judges represent their districts on the Conference of Chief Judges, as explained later in this chapter. Chief judge duties can take up to half of a judge's time during certain periods, yet all the current chief judges have caseloads in addition to their administrative duties. None of the chief judges plays a purely administrative role, although it is within their discretion to do so.

Supervision of Judges

Although chief judges have general administrative authority in their districts, they do not have supervisory or disciplinary control over the district judges, all of whom are independently elected officials. We learned that chief judges often become a point of contact regarding complaints about judges in their district. People sometimes complain about other judges' decisions, even though chief judges do not have authority to change them. When people complain about a

²² *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.69, subd. 5.

²³ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §484.70, subd. 1, 7.

²⁴ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §410.05, subd. 1, 2.

judge's courtroom demeanor or style, however, the chief judge sometimes serves as a resource to the judge, offering suggestions or even recommending counseling if it appears warranted. Many chief judges choose to monitor motions made to remove judges from cases and intervene when they see repeated motions to remove a particular judge.

As described below, formal disciplinary actions against judges can only occur following investigations by the Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards. Based on that board's recommendations, the Supreme Court determines whether to censure or remove judges for failure to perform their duties, incompetence, habitual intemperance, or conduct prejudicial to administering justice.²⁵

Although chief judges cannot require judges in their district to subject themselves to performance evaluations, many said they encourage their judges to do so. Such evaluations are done at a judge's own prerogative. They may be administered within the district or through the State Court Administrator's Office and typically include collecting opinions on a judge's performance from attorneys and court staff.

MINNESOTA BOARD ON JUDICIAL STANDARDS

Minnesota's Constitution states that the Legislature may "provide for the retirement, removal or other discipline of any judge who is disabled, incompetent or guilty of conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice."²⁶ In 1971 the Legislature created Minnesota's Board on Judicial Standards to act upon complaints of judicial misconduct or wrongdoing.²⁷ The board, whose authority extends over all judges, referees, and judicial officers, also initiates reviews of judicial physical or mental disability.

The Board on Judicial Standards hears complaints of judicial misconduct.

Minnesota's Supreme Court issues rules for the board. The rules specify procedures to follow when the board receives complaints about judges. A *Code of Judicial Conduct*, first established by the Supreme Court in 1974, sets standards for judges' ethical conduct and provides a framework for the board's regulation of judicial conduct. Examples of judicial misconduct are: improper treatment of parties, counsel, jurors, court staff or others; conflicts of interest; failure to promptly dispose of judicial business; chemical abuse; and engaging in improper election campaign activities.

By statute, the board has ten members.²⁸ One is a Court of Appeals judge; three are district judges; two are lawyers who have practiced for at least ten years; and four are citizens who are neither judges nor lawyers. The Governor appoints the judge members; the Governor also appoints other members with the advice and

²⁵ Minn. Stat. (2000) §490.16, subd. 3.

²⁶ Minn. Const., art. VI, sec. 9.

²⁷ Minn. R. Board on Judicial Standards, 2 (a); and Minn. Stat. (2000) §490.15, 490.16, and 490.18.

²⁸ Minn. Stat. (2000) §490.15, sub. 1.

consent of the Senate. A term is four years long and members may serve two terms.

Once it receives complaints, the board conducts a preliminary evaluation and, if there is sufficient cause to proceed, an investigation. Most complaints are dismissed without need for a substantial investigation, as shown in Table 1.1 for 1998 and 1999. Following an investigation, the board may do one of two things if it determines a need to proceed. First, it may issue a public reprimand for conduct that is unacceptable but does not merit further discipline by the Supreme Court. In 1999, the board issued two public reprimands.

Table 1.1: Actions by Board on Judicial Standards, 1998-99

	1998	1999
<u>Number Who Were Subject of Complaints</u>		
District Court judges	89	122
Referees/judicial officers	14	13
Retired - active duty judges	1	2
Court of Appeals judges	0	5
Supreme Court justices	2	0
Tax Court-Workers Compensation judges	0	1
<u>Dispositions</u>		
Dismissals	93	132
Public reprimands	3	2
Warnings	5	8
Personal appearances	3	6
Visit by board delegation	2	2
Conditions imposed	1	2

SOURCE: Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards, *Annual Report 1999* (St. Paul, 2000), 7, 8; and Board on Judicial Standards, *Annual Report 1998* (St. Paul, 1999), 7, 8.

Most complaints about judges are dismissed.

Alternatively, the board may prepare a statement of charges, have the judge respond, and then either dismiss the charges or proceed with a formal complaint to the Supreme Court. Should a majority of the board eventually concur to recommend sanctions to the Supreme Court, the following sanctions are possible: removal, retirement, imposing discipline as an attorney, imposing limitations or conditions on the performance of judicial duties, censure, imposing a civil penalty, or suspension with or without pay. Twelve cases required substantial investigation in each of 1998 and 1999, but all of the complaints were resolved without sanctions by the Supreme Court. In fact, since 1990 the Supreme Court has sanctioned only one district judge at the recommendation of the board; sanctions in this case were a Supreme Court reprimand, suspension of pay for 60 days, and payment of \$3,500 to the state.

Even if the board does not determine sufficient cause exists for a formal hearing, it may impose conditions on the judge's conduct, direct professional counseling or treatment, or warn a judge about conduct that may be cause for discipline. Eight cases out of 144 complaints in 1999 resulted in warnings to the judges involved; two resulted in imposing conditions on the judges.

**Minnesota's
Conference of
Chief Judges is
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making body
for the district
courts.**

In addition to its investigation function, the board encourages judges to approach it with their ethical questions.²⁹ After studying the issues, the board issues advisory opinions applying the *Code of Judicial Conduct* to the ethical questions for the benefit of all judges.

Conference of Chief Judges

Since 1985 the Conference of Chief Judges has been the policy-making body for the district courts.³⁰ Membership in the conference consists of the chief judges and assistant chief judges from around the state. Ex-officio, nonvoting members include the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the State Court Administrator, and the presidents of the Minnesota District Judges Association and the Minnesota Judicial District Administrators Association. Conference members typically meet once monthly, joined by district administrators.

Every two years, the conference elects by majority vote a chair and vice-chair. Besides setting agendas, presiding over conference meetings, and appointing committee chairs, the conference chair is also the primary contact with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

The Conference of Chief Judges sets statewide direction for the district courts' budget and policies. During the months we conducted this study in 2000, the Conference of Chief Judges dealt with an array of concerns, including: finance and budgetary issues, the use of retired judges, initiatives to implement components of the *Minnesota Courts Strategic Plan*, measures to reduce judicial stress, the collection of race data to analyze racial fairness in the courts, court employee salaries and an employee recognition program, and improvements to the process for determining the number of judgeships.

THE SUPREME COURT AND DISTRICT COURTS

The Supreme Court has certain authority related to district courts, in addition to administering sanctions for judge misconduct, as described earlier. When district judge vacancies occur, the Supreme Court determines whether to refill, transfer, or abolish the judge position.³¹ It bases its determination on whether the position is necessary for effective judicial administration or adequate access to the courts.

In addition, the Chief Justice has supervisory powers and coordination responsibilities over the courts in the state.³² According to statutes, the Chief Justice has authority for supervising (1) the courts' financial affairs, (2) continuing education for judges and other court staff, and (3) planning and operations

²⁹ Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards, *Annual Report 1999* (St. Paul, 2000), 11.

³⁰ State Court Administrator's Office, *History of Court Reform in Minnesota* (St. Paul, 2000), 9.

³¹ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §2.722, subd. 4.

³² *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §2.724, subd. 2, 4.

Rules adopted by the Supreme Court have made district court procedures more uniform.

The Supreme Court encourages district judges to be involved in their communities.

research. The Chief Justice also supervises the administrative operations of the courts.

Coordination for the District Courts

Over the years, the Supreme Court has acted to create a more coordinated district court system. For example, it adopted the *Uniform General Rules of Practice*, superceding local rules that individual districts had in place. Since the 1970s, the Supreme Court has promulgated rules for civil and criminal procedures, juvenile court, and evidence, among others. More recently, the Supreme Court issued statewide rules for administering court interpreters and implementing a statewide guardian *ad litem* system.

Moreover, since 1976, the Chief Justice has had authority to assign a judge to work in a district court other than the judge's own, as the need arises.³³ This has provided a mechanism for making all district court judges available to serve where statewide needs dictated. Minnesota's Supreme Court has also overseen implementation of automated court case information systems that, with the exception of two counties, operate statewide.

Judicial Branch Strategic Plan

The Conference of Chief Judges, in collaboration with the Supreme Court, published a strategic plan for the judiciary in 1996. Based on the strategic plan, the judiciary's current initiatives aim to improve four concerns: juvenile justice, the use of technology, access to the courts, and public trust and confidence in the courts. In 2000, Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz re-established an "Intercourt Committee" to share information among the different levels of courts and to oversee implementation of the strategic plan. As its name suggests, the Intercourt Committee includes members from the three levels of courts and their administration.

Community Outreach

The Supreme Court has used the judicial leave policy, which applies to district court judges, as a mechanism to encourage community involvement. Besides specifying vacation leave and disability leave, since 1997 the policy has permitted judges to take limited leave time for community outreach activities. According to the policy, districts receive two judge days per year for each of its judges. The chief judge authorizes use of those days for events that offer an opportunity to educate and inform the public on the justice system.

To encourage communication and interaction between the judicial and legislative branches, the Chief Justice created an "Interbranch Forum" with the support of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and Majority Leader of the Senate. The forum consists of 17 judges and 20 legislative leaders. It is the Chief Justice's intent that the forum meet on an ad hoc basis to create a better understanding of the judiciary among legislators and to discuss ways legislators and the judiciary can work together to promote public safety and better serve the public.

³³ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §2.724, subd. 1.

The State Court Administrator oversees the administration of district courts at the direction of the Chief Justice.

In implementing the administrative and coordinating functions, the Chief Justice and Supreme Court rely on the State Court Administrator's Office.

State Court Administrator's Office

In the early 1960s the Legislature created an office of administrative assistant to the Supreme Court that later became known as the State Court Administrator's Office. The State Court Administrator is appointed by, and serves at the pleasure of, the Supreme Court.³⁴

By law, the court administrator takes direction from the Chief Justice and attends to assignments from the Supreme Court. The State Court Administrator has responsibilities in four major areas: (1) budget and financial management, (2) statewide technological information systems, (3) court research and evaluation, and (4) public information and liaison with other governmental units. Table 1.2 outlines the specific statutory responsibilities of the State Court Administrator.

In the last two years, the State Court Administrator's Office established a court executive team with members who are either district administrators or court administrators from the individual counties. The court executive team is intended to bring greater cohesion to the administrative side of the district courts. It works on ways to implement statewide policies at the local court level.

Table 1.2: Statutory Duties of the State Court Administrator

- Examine and make recommendations to improve the administrative methods and systems used by judges, court administrators, and other court employees
- Examine the state of court dockets
- Recommend to the chief justice the assignment of judges where courts are in need of assistance
- Collect statistical and other data on court business
- Prepare budgets for operating the judiciary
- Collect data and report on public expenditures for operating the judiciary
- Report on cases that have not been disposed of on a timely basis
- Recommend policies for improving the judicial system
- Prepare annual report on the activities of the office
- Prepare uniform standards for recruiting, evaluating, training, and disciplining court support staff
- Prepare uniform requirements for court budget and information systems and the use of court records
- Review plans for office equipment needed by the judicial districts

SOURCE: *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §480.15, subd. 2 - 12.

³⁴ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §480.13.

EFFECT OF OTHERS ON DISTRICT COURTS

Many people, in addition to judges and court staff, are involved in the courts and can greatly affect case processing. Although prosecutors, public defenders, law enforcement officers, and probation personnel are generally independent from the courts, their actions directly affect court operations.

Lawyers, law enforcement officers, and probation personnel affect court operations.

Chief judges and district administrators we interviewed described how actions by people and organizations outside of their control dramatically affect the courts. For example, when a city police department begins a sting operation to crack down on driving while intoxicated (DWI) offenses, the effort typically produces a tremendous increase in court cases. Courts have no control over these efforts and may be unaware of them until they experience the resultant caseload increase. As another example, waiting for forensic test results from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension may delay hearing a case.

Budgets for one criminal justice agency may affect others' operations elsewhere. This is particularly evident with public defenders and the courts. As explained in Chapter 5, when we surveyed judges about factors contributing to delays for criminal and juvenile cases, the most frequently reported response was that too few public defenders greatly contributes to delay.

Interdisciplinary Meetings

We learned that many judges and administrators meet with officials from other criminal justice agencies to improve communication and coordination. For instance, courts in several counties have justice advisory councils comprised of judges, law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders, and probation services that meet to discuss common issues or methods for implementing state directives. Court administrators indicated that they commonly hold interdisciplinary meetings with representatives of outside agencies to improve case processing.

Judges and administrators often meet with representatives of other agencies to discuss court-related issues.

In some judicial districts, such as the Fifth (southwestern Minnesota) and the Tenth (north metropolitan and east central Minnesota), the courts regularly invite the head of the local bar, the chief public defender, or corrections supervisor to bench meetings. Some judges in less populated counties said they have near-daily interactions with the local sheriff and probation personnel, so formal meetings are unnecessary. Others indicated that committees including other agencies only exist on an ad hoc basis as topics arise, such as race bias or family violence.

Some counties appoint corrections advisory boards to discuss issues related to probation services and corrections. For counties providing probation services through the Community Corrections Act, these advisory boards must represent law enforcement, prosecution, the judiciary, education, corrections, ethnic minorities, social services, and lay citizens.³⁵ Most probation officials with whom we spoke indicated that their advisory boards provide a useful forum for discussing new laws or problems related to the courts.

³⁵ *Minn. Stat.* (2000) §401.08, subd. 1.