

Agency Purpose

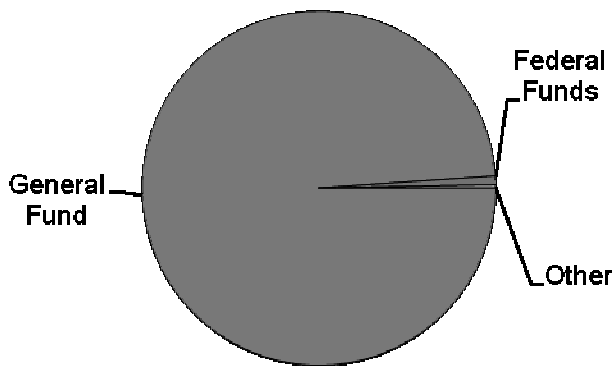
Minnesota’s trial courts resolve citizens’ criminal cases and civil disputes. Most cases begin in Minnesota trial courts.

- **Mission** – To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair, competent, and timely resolution of cases and controversies.
- **Vision** – The general public and those who use the court system will refer to it as accessible, fair, consistent, responsive, free of discrimination, independent, and well managed.

At a Glance

- Each year, about 1.7 million cases are filed in Minnesota’s trial courts.
- Trial court judges in Minnesota are among the hardest working in the country. They handle an average of 49% more cases each than do judges in states with comparable court systems.
- The judiciary completed a massive transformation, moving from a county-funded to state-funded system. As of FY 2006 all trial courts are state funded. Significant efficiencies have been made possible as a result of reducing middle management costs
- Today over 50% of counties are sharing a court administrator and are moving staff and work across county lines as needed.
- Redesign of core court technology is underway.
 - In 2008, the trial courts fully implemented the new Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS) technology application in counties throughout the state.
 - The clerical processing of 1.1 million payable citations is being transferred from 87 counties to a centralized, virtual payment center to reduce costs, improve customer service, and increase collections.
 - The branch is promoting e-citations, e-complaints, e-charging, and e-filing with justice partners to reduce manual labor, improve data accuracy, and cut costs.
 - New interactive television (ITV) rules were promulgated to expand use of video conferencing to save time and travel costs for justice partners.
- The judicial branch operates in a constantly changing environment.
 - Laws, case types, and legal sanctions change annually.
 - Caseload volume is determined by other branches and levels of government.
- The Minnesota courts regularly review their effectiveness by monitoring:
 - case filing trends;
 - case clearance rates; and,
 - elapsed case time from filing to disposition.

Est. FY 2010-11 Expenditures by Fund



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement.

Strategies

The trial court has original statewide jurisdiction in all civil and criminal actions within district boundaries. There are ten judicial districts, and 289 district court judges. A family court division, juvenile court division, probate division, conciliation court division, and a traffic and ordinance violations bureau exist in the district court.

The Trial Courts conducts its work in support of the following three strategic priority areas:

- **Access to Justice** – Ensuring the justice system is open, affordable, effective, and accountable to the people it serves.
- **Administering Justice for More Effective Results** – Working across branches of government and with other stakeholders to improve outcomes for and the delivery of services for children, families, and alcohol and other drug (AOD) addicted offenders who come into our courts.
- **Public Trust Accountability and Impartiality** – Through education, outreach to diverse communities, and a commitment to system-wide customer service and accountability, improving citizens’ understanding of and confidence in the Third Branch of government.

To further the three goals contained in the branch’s strategic plan – Access to Justice; Administering Justice for More Effective Results; and Public Trust Accountability and Impartiality – the strategic plan outlines future priorities. Each of these specific priorities addresses challenges facing the court system by targeting judicial branch resources in a focused manner on achievable and measurable strategies. Implementation of these priorities will take place over the life of the strategic plan with specific performance measures to evaluate their success. Attached is a link to the FY 2010-11 Judicial Branch Strategic Plan:

http://www.mncourts.gov/Documents/0/Public/Judicial_Council/FY10-11_Strategic_Plan.pdf

Service strategies the trial courts currently are implementing are as follows:

- Set case processing and case management standards, and institute monitoring programs for exceptions to ensure timely disposition of cases.
- Develop programs to allow litigants meaningful access to the court process, e.g., court interpreter programs, free legal services for the poor, and self-help programs for persons who choose to guide their own litigation.
- Explore ways to use technology to improve and expedite the work of the courts, including making justice more consumer-oriented.
- Develop programs and technologies to provide judges the critical information needed to make timely and sound case and policy decisions.
- Delegate legal research and where possible draft decision writing to law clerks, freeing judges to spend more time hearing cases or directing the case dispositional activities.
- Review and evaluate court practices and policies to identify the need for systemic improvement through the Judicial Council and its committees.
- Explore greater integration and coordination with other justice and social service agencies.
- Develop an adequate and stable funding base, and develop a long-term allocation formula to equitably distribute state funding among the ten judicial districts.

Key Activity Goals & Measures

It is the policy of the Minnesota Judicial Branch to establish core performance goals and to monitor key results that measure progress toward meeting these goals in order to ensure accountability of the branch, improve overall operations of the court, and enhance the public’s trust and confidence in the judiciary. The six core performance goals of the Judicial Branch are as follows: Access to Justice; Timeliness; Integrity and Accountability; Excellence; Fairness and Equity; Quality Court Workplace Environment. Each of the goals is accompanied by corresponding performance measures. Regular review of these measures enables the Branch to identify what it is doing well and what it needs to improve.

The full report, entitled, “Judicial Branch 2010 Performance Measures – Key Results and Measures Report” can be found at the following link:

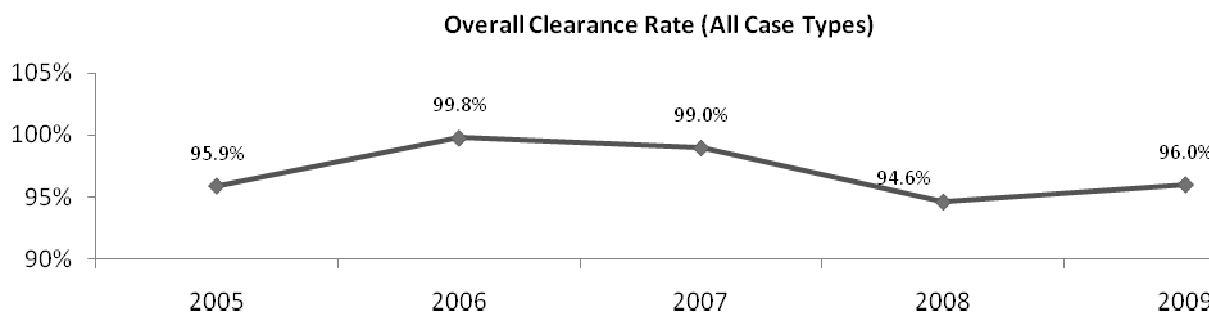
http://www.mncourts.gov/Documents/0/Public/Court_Information_Office/Annual_Report_2010_Performance_Measures.pdf

The goal of timeliness indicates whether the Trial Courts are handling cases in a timely manner. Recent budget cuts along with chronic underfunding have contributed to the Trial Courts lacking the resources they need to perform their work in a timely way. As a result the Trial Courts have some areas of performance that are in need of improvement. The measures below outline some areas of concern:

Goal: Timeliness – The Minnesota Judicial Branch will resolve cases and controversies in a timely and expeditious way without unnecessary delays.

Measure: Clearance Rates

Number of dispositions for a specified period of time divided by the number of filings (multiplied times 100). A Clearance Rate of 100% indicates a court is ‘keeping up’ with cases filed.



Source: Branch 2010 Performance Measures – Key Results and Measures Report

Findings:

- District courts disposed of 96% of the number of cases filed in 2009.
- The 2009 statewide overall clearance rate (96%) is the same as in 2005, and has declined since 2006.
- Minor Criminal Clearance Rates have been below 100% in the past four of five years resulting in the number of pending cases increasing by 6% from 2005-2009. (The appendix to the Branch 2010 Performance Measures report contains complete statewide clearance rates reports by case type. A link to that report has been provided.)

Measure: Time to Disposition

Time to Disposition assesses the length of time it takes to process cases compared to the Judicial Council objectives for timely case processing as outlined in Judicial Council Policy 505(a), Timing Objective for Case Dispositions. The measure is reported as a percentage of cases that have met the timing objectives for when 90%, 97% and 99% of cases should be disposed. Cases disposed beyond the 99th percentile are considered to have not met timing objectives.

For the Major Criminal case type, which includes felonies and gross misdemeanors, 90% of cases are to be disposed in four months, 97% of cases are to be disposed in six months, and 99% of cases are to be disposed in 12 months.

Findings:

- In 2009 only 53% of Major Criminal cases were disposed at the 90th percentile objective of four months.
- The 2009 disposition results for the Serious Felony case type – a subset of the Major Criminal case group – were as follows:
 - Only 21% of Serious Felony cases were disposed at the 90th percentile objective of four months.
 - 36% were disposed at the 97th percentile objective of six months.
 - And, 71% were disposed at the 99th percentile of 12 months. In other words, nearly one-third (29%) of Serious Felony dispositions occurred beyond the 12 month objective.

Measure: Age of Pending

Age of Pending is the percent of currently pending cases that are within the timing objectives for timely case processing (time objectives vary by case type and are the same as those used for Time to Disposition per Judicial Council Policy 505(a)). Cases pending beyond the 99th percentile objective can be considered as one measure of court backlog.

Findings:

- Only 59% of Major Criminal cases, which include felonies and gross misdemeanors, are within the 90th percentile timing objective of four months.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of Domestic Abuse, Major Juvenile and Minor Criminal cases are within the 90th percentile timing objectives for their case types (For Domestic Abuse, the 90th percentile timing objective is two months. For Major Juvenile and Minor Criminal, the 90th percentile timing objective is three months.)

Operations

With nearly two million cases filed each year, the work of the trial courts has a substantial impact on Minnesota citizens, businesses, and government at all levels.

There are trial courts in 100 locations across the state providing access and justice to citizens in every county. Judges are assisted in their adjudicative work by law clerks (who perform legal research) and court reporters (who record trial proceedings). Court administration staff at the county and district level manage scheduling, case flow, finance, personnel, and juries. Judicial District Administrators and staff assist the Chief Judge in each district in carrying out his/her responsibility as the administrative head of all courts within the district.

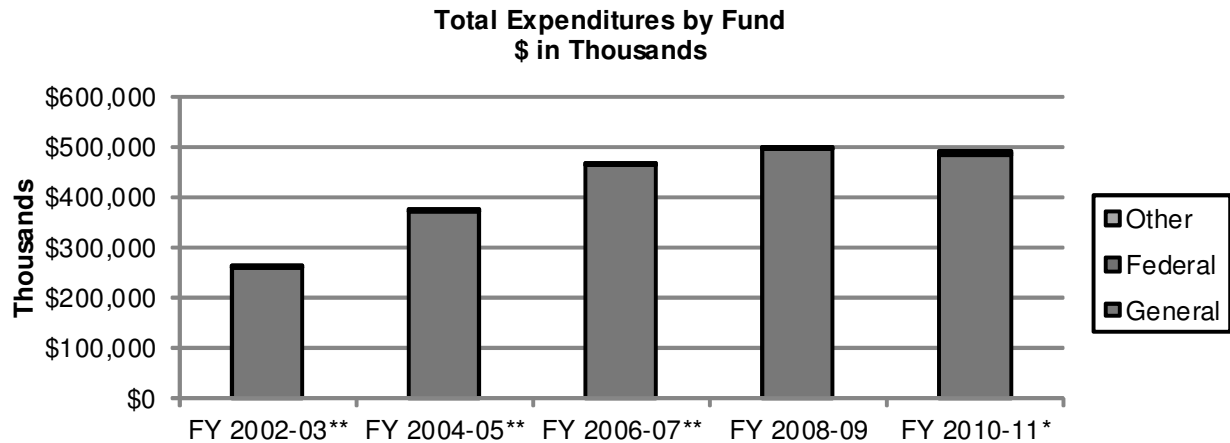
Budget Trends

For the trial courts, General Fund direct appropriations are the primary funding source. For FY 2010-11, General Fund direct appropriations account for 98.9% of funding for the trial court. Federal grants represent 0.8% of funding for the trial courts. The balance of funding is from special revenue funds and other grants and gifts, representing 0.3% of the trial courts funding.

Most of the increased expenditures for the period of FY 2002 through FY 2006 reflect the transformation of moving the judiciary from a county-funded to state-funded system. Trial Court budgets were established through

the transfer of Homestead Agriculture Credit Aid (HACA) from county budgets to the state general fund. These funds were then appropriated by the Legislature. As of FY 2006 all trial courts are state funded.

For the past eight years, the State GAL program has functioned as a mandated service housed within the State Court Administrators Office and funded in the Trial Courts budget. The Legislature created a new Board to move the State Guardian Ad Litem Program out of the state court system and establish an independent guardian ad litem program, effective July 1, 2010. Estimated expenditures for FY 2010-11 were reduced by \$12.4 million to reflect this transition.



* FY 2010-11 is estimated, not actual

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Source data for the previous chart is the Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) as of 8/26/10.

Significant external factors impacting agency operations include: Economic downturn/recession; inadequate and increasingly unstable funding base; budget cuts to public defender offices, counties and municipalities; increased demand for interpreter services due to clients with limited English proficiency; fluctuating court filings; growing complexity of Children in Need of Protective Services (CHIPS) cases; increasing number of self-represented litigants; economic downturn resulting in increased conciliation and consumer credit cases; aging population placing greater pressure on monitoring of vulnerable adults (conservators and guardians); murder rates rising in the Twin Cities' metropolitan area.

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