



Minnesota's Judiciary and Our Judicial Elections

Voting for judges is important. You want judges who are:

HONEST TRUSTWORTHY FAIR QUALIFIED IMPARTIAL

Everyone wants their own personal legal disputes to be resolved by an impartial, fair, and honest umpire, based on the law and the facts of their case. Qualities voters should look for include quality and breadth of legal experience, reputation for excellence and integrity, open-mindedness, and temperament. Read the candidate bios to decide who fits this description.

The role of Minnesota's courts is to:

- decide cases that come before them fairly and impartially;
- protect individual rights and liberties by striking down laws that violate the state or federal Constitution;
- act as checks on the other branches of government to ensure that they stay within the bounds of their authority; and
- uphold laws passed by the legislature when needed.

How does Minnesota select its judges?

- Under the Minnesota Constitution, judges are elected.
- The position is considered nonpartisan, so no party affiliation appears on the ballot.
- Whenever a vacancy occurs in mid-term, the Constitution provides that the Governor shall appoint a judge to fill the vacancy. The large majority of judges are initially selected in this manner.
- The Governor appoints trial (district) court judges based on nominations by a Merit Selection Commission that evaluates candidates' qualifications based on factors such as integrity, ability, judicial temperament, experience, maturity, community service, diligence, and legal knowledge.

- Appellate judges serve on the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court, and they serve the entire state. Under Minnesota law, appellate judges do not have to be nominated by the Merit Selection Commission. But, most Governors choose to use the merit selection process for appellate court judges as well as trial court judges.
- Once appointed, a judge must run for election to a six-year term in the next general election occurring more than one year after the appointment. Judges run for re-election every six years.

How are judges in Minnesota held accountable?

- Elections are one way Minnesota's judges are held accountable
- Minnesota's judiciary is held accountable in several other important ways, including through appeals of lower court decisions
- Oversight by the State Board on Judicial Standards and the Judicial Council, and
- The rights of persons involved in lawsuits, under certain circumstances, to remove a judge they believe will not be fair and impartial.