

STATE OF MINNESOTA

BOARD ON JUDICIAL STANDARDS



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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MEMBERS AND STAFF*

Judge Members

Hon. Shereen M. Askalani
Fourth Judicial District
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Hon. Jeanne M. Cochran (Eff. 5/25)
Minnesota Court of Appeals
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Hon. Stephanie L. Beckman (Eff. 5/25)
Eighth Judicial District
Litchfield, Minnesota

Hon. Charlene Hatcher (Exp. 5/25)
Fourth Judicial District
Minneapolis, MN

Hon. Louise Dovre Bjorkman (Exp. 5/25)
Minnesota Court of Appeals
St. Paul, Minnesota

Hon. Theresa M. Neo
Sixth Judicial District
Duluth, Minnesota

Attorney Members

Theresa Harris
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Timothy O'Brien, Chair
Edina, Minnesota

Public Members

Dr. Scott A. Fischer
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Debbie Toberman
Plymouth, Minnesota

Dr. Scott Sakaguchi
Edina, Minnesota

Nhia Vang
Woodbury, MN

Staff

Sara P. Boeshans
Executive Secretary

Amy Ihlan
Staff Attorney

Mary Pat Maher
Executive Assistant

*Brief biographies are appended at the end of this report.

FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

On behalf of the board members and staff of the Board on Judicial Standards, it is our pleasure to present this 2025 Annual Report of the Board on Judicial Standards to the citizens of Minnesota, Governor, Legislature, and the Minnesota Judiciary.

The board members take great pride in their diligent efforts to provide education, ensure compliance with the Code of Judicial Conduct, review and investigate complaints, and recommend discipline of judges.

The Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards (Board) is charged with enforcing the Minnesota Code of Judicial Conduct and with interpreting the Code for the education of judges and others. The Minnesota Legislature created the Board in 1971 and provides its operational funds. The Governor appoints all Board members, including four judges, four public members, and two lawyers. The public members and the lawyers are subject to Senate confirmation. All board members serve in a volunteer capacity. The Minnesota Supreme Court adopts rules of the Code of Judicial Conduct and adopts rules governing Board procedures.

The Judicial Code establishes a high standard for judicial conduct in the State of Minnesota. The Preamble to the Code states:

An independent, fair, and impartial judiciary is indispensable to our system of justice. The United States legal system is based upon the principle that an independent, impartial, and competent judiciary, composed of men and women of integrity, will interpret and apply the law that governs our society. Thus, the judiciary plays a central role in preserving the principles of justice and the rule of law. Inherent in all the Rules contained in this Code are the precepts that judges, individually and collectively, must respect and honor the judicial office as a public trust and strive to maintain and enhance confidence in the legal system.

Judges should maintain the dignity of judicial office at all times and avoid both impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in their professional and personal lives. They should aspire at all times to conduct that ensures the greatest possible public confidence in their independence, impartiality, integrity, and competence.

The members of the Board take these principles to heart in carrying out their duties and make every effort to fulfill the Board's mission.

The Board's primary function is to receive, investigate, and evaluate complaints of judicial misconduct. Complaints that do not allege conduct that violates the Code are dismissed. If the Board finds that a judge has violated the Code, the Board may issue private discipline or a public reprimand. In cases involving more serious misconduct, the Board may seek public discipline by filing a formal complaint against the judge with the

Minnesota Supreme Court. After a public hearing, potential discipline imposed by the Supreme Court may include a reprimand, suspension, or removal from office. In addition to cases involving misconduct, the Board has jurisdiction to consider allegations that a judge has a physical or mental disability that impairs their judicial performance.

Education is also an important Board function. The Board and the Executive Secretary respond to judges' requests for informal advisory opinions. The Board also issues formal opinions on subjects of importance. The Board's website provides a wealth of information, including links to the Code of Judicial Conduct, the Board's procedural rules, Board opinions, public discipline cases, annual reports, and other judicial conduct resources. In addition, the Executive Secretary gives presentations on current ethics topics to newly appointed judges, at meetings of district court judges, and at state-wide judicial seminars. Finally, the Executive Secretary endeavors to maintain open and cordial relationships with the Minnesota Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, and the Minnesota District Court Judges in an effort to maintain confidence in Board decisions and compliance with the Code.

In 2025, the Board received a total of 918 complaints. This represents a 7% decrease compared to 2024, when the Board received 987 complaints, but substantially exceeds the number of complaints received in 2021 (237) and 2020 (158). The increase is likely due, in part, to the fact that the new online complaint system was in place for all of 2023, 2024 and 2025. Of the 918 complaints received in 2025, the Board summarily dismissed 869, reviewed 40 at board meetings,* authorized investigations of 16 complaints, and issued discipline against four judges. The Supreme Court also censured and suspended one judge from office for nine months. The Board issued 12 letters of caution to judges regarding their conduct to point out areas in need of improvement. In addition, the Executive Secretary issued more than 100 informal advisory opinions to individual judges at their request.

The Board accomplished many important goals in 2025. These include:

- The Board issued Formal Opinion 2025-1, *Judicial Disqualification Issues Arising from Party's or Attorney's Actions*.
- Board staff issued approximately 120 written informal advisory opinions to judges.
- The Executive Secretary presented at the Child Abuse and Neglect Judicial Institute conference. The Executive Secretary and Staff Attorney presented to the Metro Area Prosecutors.
- The Executive Secretary and Executive Assistant testified before the Minnesota House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee.
- The Board updated the "Minnesota Judicial Ethics Outline" on the Board's website. The Outline addresses a wide variety of subjects, including the history of judicial discipline in Minnesota, case law interpreting the Code, and summaries of

* Nine complaints received in 2025 were reviewed at the January 2026 Board meeting.

the Board's ethics opinions. The Board also updated its website with recent news and summaries of its recent disciplinary action.

- In May, 2025, the Board elected new officers as follows: Vice-Chair: Scott Sakaguchi and Third Executive Committee Member: Judge Shereen Askalani.
- In December 2025, Chief Judge Stephanie L. Beckman was reappointed to the Board.

In 2025, the term of Court of Appeals Judge Louise Dovre Bjorkman expired. Judge Bjorkman served the Board with distinction in the roles of Chair and Vice Chair. Court of Appeals Judge Jeanne M. Cochran was appointed to serve as the Court of Appeals judge on the Board. District Court Judge Charlene Hatcher retired from the bench and resigned from the Board. District Court Chief Judge Stephanie L. Beckman was appointed as a judicial member of the Board.

It has been a pleasure to work with such dedicated and committed staff and board members to fulfill the Board's important mission.

Tim O'Brien

Chair of the Board on Judicial Standard (January 2024-January 2026)

INTRODUCTION

A society cannot function without an effective, fair, and impartial procedure to resolve disputes. In Minnesota, the Constitution and laws provide a system designed to fit these essential criteria. The preservation of the rule of law, as well as the continued acceptance of judicial rulings, depends on unshakeable public recognition that the judiciary and the court system are worthy of respect and trust.

Unlike the executive and legislative branches of government, the judiciary “has no influence over either the sword or the purse.” The Federalist No. 78, at 465 (Alexander Hamilton). “The legal system depends on public confidence in judges, whose power rests in large measure on the ability to command respect for judicial decisions. Whether or not directly related to judicial duties, misconduct by a judge brings the office into disrepute and thereby prejudices the administration of justice.” *In re Miera*, 426 N.W.2d 851, 858 (Minn. 1988).

It is the Board’s mission to promote and preserve public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of our judicial system by enforcing the Judicial Code and by educating judges and others regarding proper judicial conduct.

AUTHORIZATION

The 1971 Legislature approved an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution authorizing the Legislature to “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.” The 1971 Legislature also created the “Commission” (now “Board”) on Judicial Standards and authorized the Supreme Court to make rules to implement the legislation. (Current version at Minn. Stat. §§ 490A.01-.03.) In 1972, Minnesota voters approved the constitutional amendment (Minn. Const. Art. VI, § 9), and the Minnesota Supreme Court adopted the Code.*

* Until 1972, Minnesota appellate and district court judges could be removed or suspended from office for misconduct only by the rarely used impeachment process, which involves impeachment by the Minnesota House of Representatives and conviction by the Minnesota Senate. Since 1996, judges have also been subject to recall by the voters, although this has never happened. Minn. Const. Art. VIII, § 6.

ORGANIZATION

The Board has ten members: one Court of Appeals judge, three district court judges, two lawyers, and four citizens who are not judges or lawyers. The Board members are appointed by the Governor and, except for the judges, are subject to confirmation by the Senate. Members' terms are four years and may be extended for an additional four years.

The Board meets approximately eight times annually and more often if necessary. Non-judge members of the Board may claim standard State per diems as well as reimbursement for expenses such as mileage. Judge members are not paid per diems.

The Board is supported by a staff consisting of the Executive Secretary, an executive assistant, and a part-time staff attorney. At the direction of the Board, the staff is responsible for reviewing and investigating complaints, providing informal opinions to judges on the application of the Code, maintaining records concerning the operation of the office, preparing the budget, administering the Board funds, and making regular reports to the Board, the Supreme Court, the Legislature, and the public.

CODE OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

The Minnesota Supreme Court has adopted the Code of Judicial Conduct to govern judicial ethics. Intrinsic to the Code are the precepts that judges, individually and collectively, must respect and honor the judicial office as a public trust and strive to enhance and maintain confidence in our legal system.

The Board considers only complaints involving the professional or personal conduct of judges. The Code is not construed so as to impinge on the essential independence of judges in making judicial decisions. Complaints about the merits of decisions by judges may be considered through the appellate process.

RULES AND PROCEDURES

The Rules of the Board on Judicial Standards are issued by the Minnesota Supreme Court. Under its Rules, the Board has the authority to investigate complaints concerning a judge's conduct or physical or mental condition. If a complaint provides information that furnishes a reasonable basis to believe there might be a disciplinary violation, the Board may direct the Executive Secretary to conduct an investigation.

Under the Rules, the Board may take several types of actions regarding complaints. It may dismiss a complaint if there is not reasonable cause to believe that the Code was violated. A dismissal may be accompanied by a letter of caution to the judge. If the Board

finds reasonable cause, it may issue a private admonition, a public reprimand, or a formal complaint. The Board may also defer a disposition or impose conditions on a judge's conduct, such as obtaining professional counseling or treatment.

The Board affords judges a full and fair opportunity to defend against allegations of improper conduct. If the Board issues a formal complaint or a judge appeals a public reprimand, a public hearing will be held. Hearings are conducted by a three-person panel appointed by the Supreme Court. After the hearing, the panel may dismiss the complaint, issue a public reprimand, or recommend that the Supreme Court impose more serious discipline, such as censure, suspension, or removal from office. If the panel recommends that the Court impose discipline or if the judge or the Board appeals the panel's action, the final decision is made by the Court.

If a judge appeals a private admonition, a private hearing will be held. Hearings are conducted by a three-person panel appointed by the Supreme Court. After the hearing, the panel may dismiss the complaint, affirm the admonition, or recommend that the Board issue a public reprimand or a formal complaint. If the judge appeals the panel's affirmance of an admonition, the Court makes the final decision.

All proceedings of the Board are confidential unless a public reprimand is issued, or a formal complaint has been filed with the Supreme Court. The Board notifies complainants of its actions, including dismissals and private dispositions, and provides brief explanations.

An absolute privilege attaches to any information or testimony submitted to the Board, and no civil action against a complainant, witness, or his or her counsel may be based on such information.

AUTHORITY AND JURISDICTION

The Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards has jurisdiction over complaints concerning the following judicial officials:

- State court judges, including judges of the District Courts, Court of Appeals and Supreme Court. There are 296 district court judge positions and 26 appellate judge positions.
- Approximately 101 retired district court judges, eleven retired court of appeals judges, and two retired supreme court justices in "senior" status, who at times serve as active judges/justices.
- Judicial branch employees who perform judicial functions, including referees, magistrates, and other judicial officers.

- Judges of the Minnesota Tax Court (3) and the Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals (5) and the Chief Judge of the Office of Administrative Hearings (1).*

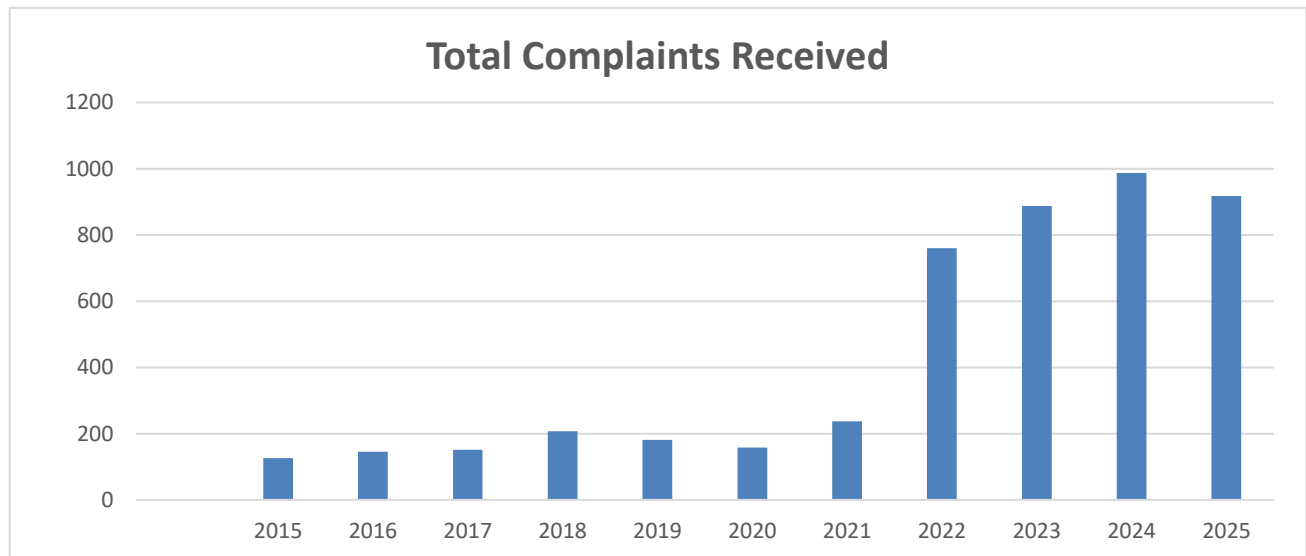
The Board does not have jurisdiction over complaints that concern the following persons:

- Court administrators or personnel, court reporters, law enforcement personnel, and other non-judicial persons.
- Federal judges. Complaints against federal judges may be filed with the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.
- Lawyers (except, in some circumstances, those who become judges or who were judges). Complaints against lawyers may be filed with the Office of Lawyers Professional Responsibility.

* See Rule 2, Rules of Board on Judicial Standards; Code of Judicial Conduct, "Application"; Minn. Stat. §§ 14.48, subds. 2 and 3(d), 175A.01, subd. 4, 271.01, subd. 1, 490A.03.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED IN 2025

In 2025, the Board received and reviewed 918 complaints, a slight decrease compared to the number of complaints received in 2024 (987). In March 2022, the Board implemented an online complaint process which was intended to increase accessibility. As the table below indicates, the number of complaints received by the Board increased exponentially after the online complaint system was in place.

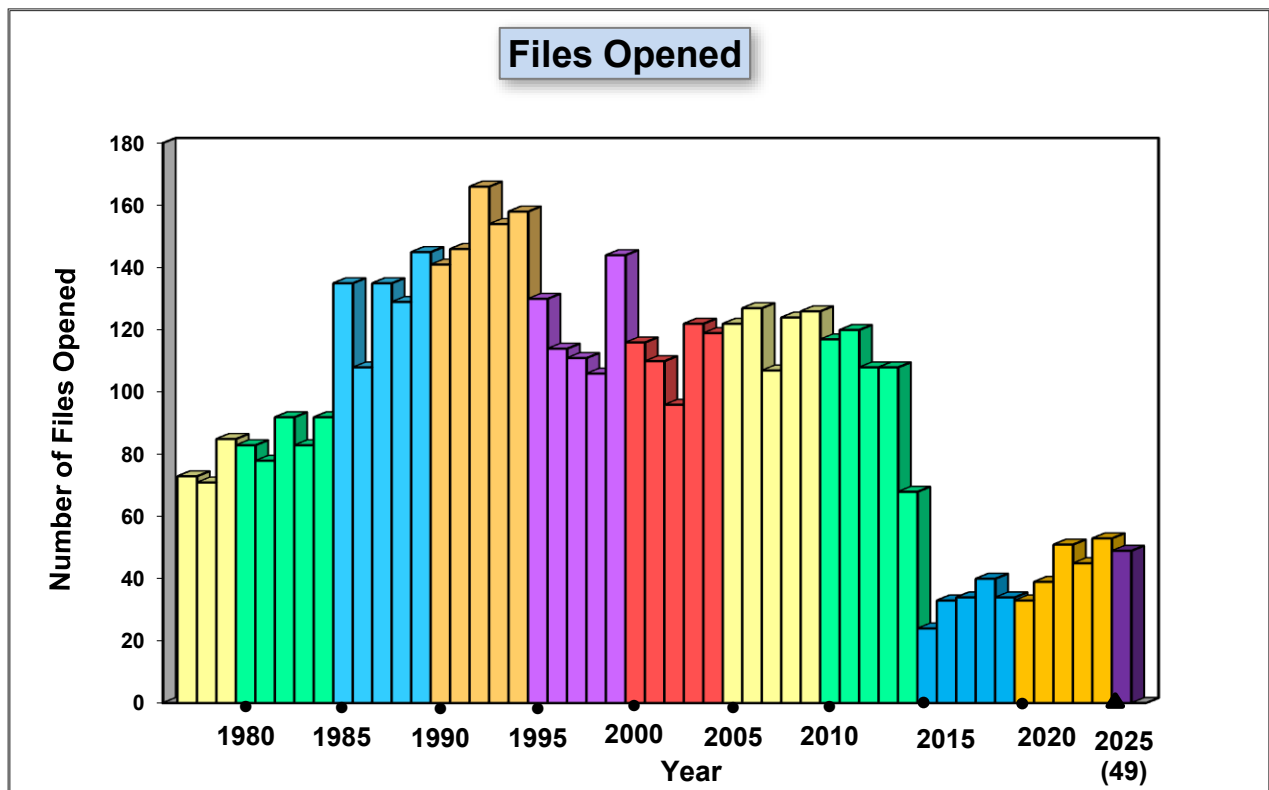


Complaints can be submitted online, via email, U.S. Mail, fax, or through personal delivery. If the person has a disability that prevents them from submitting a complaint in writing, a complaint can be submitted over the phone. Below is a table which summarizes the methods by which complaints were received in 2025.

Method by Which Complaint Was Received	Number Received	% of Total
Online Complaint System	588	64%
Mail	237	26%
Email	63	7%
Fax	17	2%
Hand Delivered	10	1 %
Phone	3	<1%
Total:	918	100%

2025 COMPLAINT STATISTICS

In 2025, the Board opened 49 files based on written complaints alleging matters within the Board’s jurisdiction. The number of files opened annually by the Board since 1977 are set forth below:



This chart shows a decline in the number of files opened beginning in 2014. The decline appears to be due to at least two factors.

First, in 2014, the Legislature transferred primary responsibility for enforcing the “90-day rule” from the Board to the chief judges of the judicial districts. The 90-day rule generally requires a judge to rule within 90 days after a case is submitted. Minn. Stat. § 546.27. Judicial Branch case-tracking reports of possible violations are now sent to the chief judges rather than to the Board.

Second, the chart reflects only matters that were reviewed by the full Board and does not reflect complaints that were summarily dismissed. If a complaint does not fall within the Board’s jurisdiction, the complaint may be summarily dismissed by the Executive Secretary, subject to the approval of a single Board member. This procedure avoids the inefficiency of requiring the full Board to review complaints that are not within its jurisdiction.

For example, complaints that merely express dissatisfaction with a judge's decision are summarily dismissed because they do not provide a reasonable belief that a judge may have engaged in misconduct. In recent years, larger numbers of complaints have been summarily dismissed, as shown in the next table:

<u>SUMMARY DISMISSALS</u> (BY YEAR)	
2016	112
2017	117
2018	167
2019	147
2020	125
2021	198
2022	709
2023	845
2024	934
2025	869

As reflected in the following table, most complaints that were reviewed by the Board were filed by litigants:

<u>SOURCES OF COMPLAINTS</u> <u>AND REPORTS – 2025</u>	
Litigant	16
Attorney	8
Self-Report	8
Judge	6
Board	4
Citizen	3
Other	3
Prosecutor	1
TOTAL	49

The next table outlines the judges who were the subject of complaints in 2025. The majority of the complaints filed and opened in 2025 were against district court judges.

<u>JUDGES SUBJECT TO COMPLAINTS AND REPORTS – 2025</u>	
District Court Judge	45
Court of Appeals Judge	3
Conciliation Court Referee	1
TOTAL	49

The types of allegations are set forth below. The total exceeds 49 because many complaints contained more than one allegation.

<u>ALLEGATIONS REPORTED – 2025</u>	
General demeanor or decorum	27
Bias, discrimination or partiality	15
Ex parte communication	7
Improper conduct on the bench	6
Delay in handling court business	5
Other	5
Failure to follow law or procedure	4
Failure to perform duties	4
Criminal behavior	3
Loss of temper	3
Abuse of authority or prestige	2
Incompetence as a judge	1
Conflict of interest	1
Sexual misconduct	1
Willful misconduct in office	1

Of the 49 new complaints that were opened in 2025, 40 of them were considered by the Board in 2025. In addition, the Board considered four new complaints that were opened in late 2024 at the January 2025 board meeting. Nine complaint files that were opened in late 2025 were considered by the Board at the January 2026 board meeting. Of the 44 new complaints considered in 2025, the Board determined that 19 of the matters warranted formal investigation. A formal investigation includes asking the judge to submit a written response to the Board. In addition, a formal investigation typically includes review of court records and interviews with court participants and may include reviewing audio recordings of the hearings. A judge or the Board may request the judge appear before the Board to discuss the allegations of judicial misconduct.

Twenty-three of the complaint files and Board-initiated investigations were dismissed in 2025. Many complaints are dismissed because they concern a judge's rulings or other discretionary decisions that are generally outside the Board's purview. The reasons for dismissal are set forth below. The total count of dismissal reasons differs from the number of complaints dismissed in 2025 because some complaints are dismissed for more than one reason. Also, in 2025, the Board considered 22 complaints that were opened in 2024 or 2023 and were still under investigation in 2025. And, at the end of 2025, eight complaints were still under investigation and thus remained open.

DISMISSAL REASONS – 2025

No misconduct; no violation	17
Unsubstantiated after investigation	8
Insufficient evidence	5
Frivolous, no grounds	2
Retired pending board action	2
No issue left to resolve	1

As shown in the table below, in 2025, five matters resulted in discipline, and twelve matters were resolved with a letter of caution to the judge.

<u>DISPOSITIONS – BY YEAR ISSUED</u>					
Year	Letter of Caution	Admonition	Deferred Disposition Agreement	Public Reprimand	Supreme Court Discipline
2016	3	1	3	1	0
2017	5	3	0	0	0
2018	9	4	0	1	0
2019	4	2	1	0	0
2020	7	0	1	1	0
2021	4	4	1	1	0
2022	3	4	0	0	0
2023	7	0	3	0	0
2024	8	0	2	3	0
2025	12	0	3	1	1

CASE DISPOSITIONS

In 2025, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on a formal complaint that was filed in 2024. The Supreme Court censured and suspended the judge for nine months, without pay, from office. In addition, the Board issued one formal complaint that resulted in a deferred disposition agreement, one public reprimand, two additional deferred disposition agreements, and twelve letters of caution. A letter of caution is a non-disciplinary disposition. A sampling of the disciplinary actions and letters of caution are summarized below.

PUBLIC DISPOSITIONS

Public dispositions are posted on the Board's website at <http://www.bjs.state.mn.us/board-and-panel-public-reprimands>. The Supreme Court issued discipline in one matter. In addition, the Board filed one formal complaint and one public reprimand in 2025.

Formal Complaints

In re Inquiry into the Conduct of the Honorable John P. Dehen, No. A24-0694, (Minn. Sept. 22, 2025).

On April 26, 2024, the Board filed a formal complaint against Tenth District Judge John P. Dehen. The complaint alleged that Judge Dehen, without authority, issued a peremptory writ ordering the district administrator to rehire his court reporter at the top of the pay range. The district administrator sought review of the peremptory writ, and the court of appeals issued a writ of prohibition which found that Judge Dehen's peremptory writ setting the court reporter's salary was unauthorized. *In re Lindahl-Pfieffer, I*, No.A23-1405 Special Term Order (Minn. Ct. App. Oct. 24, 2023). One week later, Judge Dehen, again without authority, issued an Order and Alternative Writ of Mandamus, ordering the district administrator rehire his court reporter at a specific rate of pay. The district administrator again sought review, and the court of appeals again issued a writ of prohibition which found that,

The record establishes that the judge in this case (a) initiated a proceeding in district court and assigned it to himself; (b) filed additional documents in a closed file after this court vacated the judge's decision and did not remand; (c) filed an "information" containing numerous factual allegations and then adopted those allegations as the court's findings of fact in a matter known to be contested; and (d) twice filed orders and writs setting the salary of the court reporter he has directly supervised for years. It was a conflict for the judge to initiate a proceeding involving the salary of his own court reporter and to decide it.

The district court lacked inherent authority to set the court reporter's salary by order; this court previously decided that legal issue and that determination became the law of the case. Prohibition is also appropriate because the judge acted improperly by circumventing consideration of the matter in an adversary proceeding before an impartial and disinterested court.

In re Lindahl-Pfieffer, II, No.A23-1655 Special Term Order (Minn. Ct. App. Nov. 15, 2023).

The Board alleged that in these cases, Judge Dehen had a clear disqualifying conflict of interest because he both initiated the proceedings and decided the matters, and that he failed to provide the district administrator a meaningful opportunity to be heard.

On June 17, 2024, the Board filed an amended formal complaint against Judge Dehen, which alleged that Judge Dehen failed to remain impartial, manifested prejudice, and failed to comply with the law in multiple At-Risk Juvenile Guardianship cases. The Board further alleged that Judge Dehen failed to promote confidence in the judiciary and

failed to maintain decorum and dignity by presiding over a juvenile court calendar from a vehicle while traveling out of town.

On September 16 and 17, 2024, a hearing panel, appointed by the Supreme Court, held a hearing in order to make findings of fact and conclusions of law as to whether there is clear and convincing evidence that Judge Dehen committed misconduct and to recommend sanctions. The hearing panel recommended that the Supreme Court censure Judge Dehen and suspend him without pay. Judge Dehen appealed the hearing panel's recommendation.

The Supreme Court heard oral argument on the matter on April 7, 2025. On September 22, 2025, the Supreme Court censured Judge Dehen and suspended him for nine months, without pay, from office. The Supreme Court concluded that Judge Dehen's actions with respect to the dispute over his court reporter's salary and his actions in holding a remote juvenile court calendar while riding in a motor vehicle constitute misconduct. However, the Supreme Court concluded that Judge Dehen's conduct with respect to the at-risk juvenile guardianship proceedings did not constitute misconduct. The Supreme Court wrote,

Judge Dehen's conduct in [the court reporter compensation dispute] severely undermines the public's trust in the judicial system, giving the impression that a judge may treat their office as a weapon to be used in professional disputes. More specifically, he repeatedly abused his position of authority, wielding his power differential over district court staff and other employees like a cudgel; all the while disregarding a clear conflict of interest, and twice orchestrating a judicial process that provided the district court administrator no real opportunity to respond. And even after the court of appeals dismissed his first writ of mandamus, Judge Dehen doubled down, repackaged it – creating his own “fact” of which he took judicial notice – and submitted a second writ of mandamus. His actions wasted precious judicial resources and disrespected the rule of law and the administration of justice that he took an oath to uphold. And by introducing the tools of litigation into what was essentially a human-resources issue, Judge Dehen also damaged the professional functioning of the Judicial Branch.

Finally, Judge Dehen has exhibited little if any remorse for his flagrant and egregious actions involving the court reporter dispute, and thus we must fulfill our obligation to ensure that the misconduct is not repeated again, and to deter others from similar behavior. Under these circumstances, we conclude that a suspension of nine months is appropriate.

In re Inquiry into the Conduct of the Honorable John P. Dehen, No. A24-0694, slip op. at 68 (Minn. Sept. 22, 2025).

Judge Dehen retired from office on October 10, 2025. The Board's formal complaint, Judge Dehen's responses, the Panel Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations, and the Supreme Court Opinion are available on the Board's website.

In re Inquiry into the conduct of the Honorable Jennifer Kurud Fischer, No. A25-1192.

On July 23, 2025, the Board filed a formal complaint against District Court Judge Jennifer K. Fischer with the Minnesota Supreme Court. Judge Fischer was a judge of the Eighth Judicial District of the State of Minnesota. The Board alleged that Judge Fischer violated a previously issued deferred disposition agreement and retaliated against those who had assisted or cooperated with the Board's previous investigation. The Board also alleged that Judge Fischer committed additional misconduct by failing to remain impartial, failing to maintain appropriate demeanor, and harming public confidence in the judiciary.

The Board and Judge Fischer entered into an agreed-upon disposition. Based on Judge Fischer's agreement to retire, the Board dismissed the Formal Complaint, and the Supreme Court dismissed the matter. On November 30, 2025, Judge Fischer retired from office.

The Board's Formal Complaint and Judge Fischer's response are available on the Board's website.

Public Reprimand

Judge Jay M. Quam

The Board issued a public reprimand to Judge Quam. File No. 25-05 (April 25, 2025). The Board found that Judge Quam engaged in inappropriate sexual contact with his law clerk for a period of time when she was in his employ. Several years after she left his employment, the relationship was renewed and continued until recently. Judge Quam and she were seen by court employees and justice partners in and around the courthouse without any apparent business reason. Within the past year, an attorney saw Judge Quam and his former clerk "canoodling" outside the courthouse sitting close together with hands on each other's knees.

In 2022 and early 2023, on at least three occasions, a court staff person overheard explicit sounds of sexual activity while Judge Quam and his former clerk were in his chambers.

Judge Quam made inappropriate comments to other clerks, some of which were sexual in nature. He also commented on clerk's clothing in an awkward or flirtatious way and offered compliments about food intake and appearance. One clerk estimated that Judge Quam made 50 to 60 inappropriate comments to her during her employment.

Judge Quam would also stand unnecessarily close to clerks, or leer at clerks in a way that made them feel uncomfortable.

In response to Judge Quam's conduct, clerks began to wear longer skirts, avoid his invitations to coffee or lunch, and act in an extra-professional way to avoid attracting unwanted attention. Clerks are fearful that Judge Quam may have an impact on their career and expressed uncertainty about including him as a reference.

Judge Quam admitted that he engaged in the misconduct noted above. If Judge Quam had not yet retired, the Board may have sought more serious discipline.

The Board found that Judge Quam violated the following provisions of the Code of Judicial Conduct: Rule 1.1 (Compliance with the Law), Rule 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), Rule 1.3 (Avoiding Abuse of Prestige of Judicial Office), Rule 2.3(B) (Harassment), Rule 2.8(B) (Demeanor), and Rule 3.1(A), (C), and (E) (Extrajudicial Activities). The reprimand is posted on the Board's website at <https://www.bjs.state.mn.us/board-and-panel-public-reprimands>.

PRIVATE DISCIPLINE

Summaries of the private discipline the Board has issued since 2009 are available on the Board's website at <http://www.bjs.state.mn.us/file/private-discipline/private-discipline-summaries.pdf>. The purpose of providing summaries of the private dispositions is to educate the public and to help judges avoid improper conduct. The Board issued three deferred disposition agreements and twelve letters of caution in 2025.

Deferred Disposition Agreement Issued in 2025

- The Board found reasonable cause to believe a judge committed misconduct by filing an order 151 days after the judge took it under advisement. This was the judge's third violation in five years. The Board found violations of Rules 1.1 (Compliance with the Law), 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), and 2.5 (Competence, Diligence, and Cooperation) of the Code of Judicial Conduct. The judge agreed to submit for Board approval a plan detailing how the judge will ensure all orders are timely filed, meet with the Board's Executive Secretary and a Board Mentor, submit monthly reports to the Board confirming that all orders have been timely filed, and timely respond to court staff and judicial colleagues. If the Board does not learn of any further violations within two years, the matter will be dismissed.

Letters of Caution Issued in 2025

- A judge failed to timely manage the judge's workload, which potentially impacted litigants, court staff, and justice partners. The Board encouraged the judge to maintain a personal system to monitor outstanding orders. Failure to timely manage a judge's workload could violate Rules 1.1 (Compliance with the Law), 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), 2.5 (Competence, Diligence and Cooperation), and 2.7 (Responsibility to Decide) of the Code of Judicial Conduct.
- A judge failed to timely manage the judge's workload, which potentially impacted litigants, court staff, and justice partners. The Board encouraged the judge to maintain a personal system to monitor outstanding orders and to monitor their under advisement report. Failure to timely manage a judge's workload could violate Rules 1.1 (Compliance with the Law), 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), 2.5 (Competence, Diligence and Cooperation), and 2.7 (Responsibility to Decide) of the Code of Judicial Conduct.
- The Board cautioned a judge that interrupting a party and raising their voice could violate Rules 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), 2.2 (Impartiality and Fairness), 2.6(A) (Ensuring the Right to Be Heard), and 2.8(B) (Demeanor) of the Code of Judicial Conduct.
- The Board cautioned a judge that in making a recommendation regarding a judicial candidate, the judge should be mindful about the issues they raise and the comments they make about the candidate or others to avoid potential bias or appearance of bias. The Board also encouraged the judge to consider other kinds of "appropriate action" they can take as an alternative or in addition to reporting potential misconduct of another judge under Rule 2.15(C). As judicial ethics expert Cynthia Gray observed:

[T]he absence of an effective requirement that judges confront other judges' misconduct is an obvious deficiency in judicial ethics...while judges should not report every bit of courthouse gossip, there is often a lot of truth in hearsay, and some kind of follow-up is necessary for anything but the most obviously scurrilous rumor. The kind of evidence needed to prove judicial misconduct may only be discoverable by the agency constituted for that purpose and the kind of pattern of misconduct that requires discipline may only be discernable if enough single incidents are reported.

Cynthia Gray, *Ethical Judicial Culture*, 56 Ct. Rev. 144, 145-46 (2020). The Board cautioned the judge that their conduct could violate the following Rules of the Code of Judicial Conduct: 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), 2.2 (Impartiality and Fairness), 2.3 (Bias, Prejudice, and Harassment), and 2.15 (Responding to Judicial and Lawyer Misconduct).

- The Board cautioned a judge that invoking their judicial title and seeking special treatment when speaking about a personal court case with the law clerk assigned to the judge presiding over the personal court case, could violate Rules 1.1 (Compliance with the Law), 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary), and 1.3 (Avoiding Abuse of the Prestige of Judicial Office) of the Code of Judicial Conduct. Comment 1 to Rule 1.3 states in part, “It is wrong for a judge to use or attempt to use his or her position to gain personal advantage or deferential treatment of any kind. For example, it would be improper for a judge to allude to his or her judicial status to gain favorable treatment with traffic officials.” Similarly, referring to their judicial title in a conversation with a law clerk and seeking a personal advantage in a personal matter could lead to a finding of misconduct. Such conduct could also diminish public confidence in the integrity of the judiciary.
- The Board cautioned a judge that conducting an independent investigation could violate Rule 2.9(C) of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

PUBLIC INQUIRIES

The staff receives frequent inquiries about judges’ conduct. The inquiries are often from parties involved in court proceedings. Callers are provided with information about the Board and how to file a complaint.

Board staff often receive requests for information, complaints that concern persons over whom the Board has no jurisdiction, and complaints that do not allege judicial misconduct. Callers are given appropriate referrals when other resources are available.

ADVISORY OPINIONS

The Board is authorized to issue advisory opinions on proper judicial conduct with respect to the provisions of the Code. The Board encourages judges who have ethical questions to seek its guidance. The Board provides three types of advisory opinions:

- The Board issues *formal opinions* on issues that frequently arise. These opinions are of general applicability to judges.
- A *Board opinion letter* is given to an individual judge on an issue that requires consideration by the full Board.
- The Board’s Executive Secretary issues *informal opinions* to judges as delegated by the Board pursuant to Board Rule 1(e)(11). Judges regularly contact the Executive Secretary for informal opinions on ethics questions. Depending on the nature of the request, the Executive Secretary may consult the Board Chair or another Board member.

The Board began issuing formal opinions in 2013. The Board's current practice is to ask for public comments on its proposed formal opinions before the opinions are made final. Formal opinions are sent to the chief judges of the Minnesota courts and are posted on the Board's website at <http://www.bjs.state.mn.us/formal-opinions>. The Board issued a formal opinion in 2025.

The Executive Secretary gave more than a hundred informal advisory opinions to judges in 2025. This continues the trend of a significant increase over prior years, reflecting the increased assistance the Board is providing to judges who are faced with ethics issues. The opinions cover a wide range of subjects, including disqualification standards and permissible extrajudicial activities. In many cases, the judge requests the opinion by telephone and the opinion is given orally. Since 2014, however, opinions are usually confirmed by e-mail and include analysis and citation to legal authority.

BUDGET

The Board's base budget in 2025 was \$520,000 per year, which was used to pay staff salaries, rent, and other expenses. The staff consists of the Executive Secretary, a part-time staff attorney, and an executive assistant.

In addition, a special account funded at \$125,000 per year is available to the Board to pay the expenses of major cases, which often require the Board to retain private counsel, resulting in significant expenditures for attorney fees.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For additional information regarding the Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards, please feel free to contact the Executive Secretary at (651) 296-3999.

Dated: February 18, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Timothy O'Brien

Timothy O'Brien
Past Chair, Minnesota Board on
Judicial Standards

/s/ Sara P. Boeshans

Sara P. Boeshans
Executive Secretary, Minnesota
Board on Judicial Standards

BOARD AND STAFF BIOGRAPHIES

Honorable Shereen M. Askalani

Judge of District Court (Fourth District). Appointed to the bench in 2016. Assistant Ramsey County Attorney from 2002 to 2016. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2020.

Honorable Stephanie L. Beckman

Chief Judge of District Court (Eighth District). Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2025. Appointed to the bench in 2012. Assistant Chief Judge of the Eighth Judicial District 2018-2021. Chief Judge of the Eighth Judicial District 2021-2026. Meeker County Attorney 2005-2012.

Honorable Louise Dovre Bjorkman

Board Vice Chair and Judge of Minnesota Court of Appeals. Appointed to the Court of Appeals in 2008. Judge, Second Judicial District Court, 1998-2005. Private practice of law, 1985-1998 and 2005-2008. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2017.

Honorable Jeanne M. Cochran

Judge of Minnesota Court of Appeals. Appointed in 2018. Elected in 2020. Administrative Law Judge from 2012-2018. Assistant Attorney General from 2000-2012. From 1992-2000, worked at the Minnesota House of Representatives in a non-partisan role, in private practice, and for a public-interest, nonprofit law firm. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2025.

Scott A. Fischer, PhD., LP, ABPP

Public Member. Dr. Fischer is a forensic psychologist in private practice in Saint Paul. He is the former chair of the Minnesota Board of Psychology. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2022.

Theresa M. Harris, Esq.

Attorney Member. In-house counsel at a corporation providing legal advice regarding complex business contracts, product labeling and advertising claims, marketing-related regulations, and legal compliance. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2022.

Honorable Charlene W. Hatcher

Judge of District Court (Fourth District). Appointed to the bench in 2016. Past employment includes Chief Civil Deputy Hennepin County Attorney; Managing Attorney, Human Services Division, Hennepin County Attorney's Office; and Special Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Minnesota Attorney General. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2022.

Honorable Theresa M. Neo

Judge of District Court (Sixth District). Appointed to the bench in 2014. Assistant Duluth City Attorney 2010-2014. Staff Attorney Indian Legal Assistance Program 2005-2010, Attorney Safe Haven Shelter 2002-2005. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2020.

Timothy O'Brien, Esq.

Board Chair and Attorney Member. Retired partner, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP. Served as a member of the Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board from 1997-2003, as a member of the Minnesota Client Security Board from 2007-2013, and as a member of the Minnesota Commission on Judicial Selection from 2011-2018. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2019.

Dr. Scott Sakaguchi

Executive Committee Member and Public Member. Dr. Sakaguchi was trained as a cardiologist and, in 2019, retired from practice as a Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2021.

Debbie Toberman

Public Member. Retired Claim Supervisor at Minnesota Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company. Ms. Toberman was a Claim Representative at Minnesota Lawyers Mutual from 1986 to 2006. She served as a public member on the Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board from 2005 - 2011 and the Fourth District Ethics Committee from 1997 - 2009. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2020.

Nhia Vang

Public Member. Ms. Vang works for the City of Saint Paul and has more than 20 years' experience in public service in the areas of administration, budget, and policy. Appointed to the Board on Judicial Standards in 2019.

Sara P. Boeshans

Executive Secretary. Admitted to practice in 2007. Ms. Boeshans clerked for Judge Marybeth Dorn, Second Judicial District, after which she was employed in the Minnesota Attorney General's Office. Prior to being appointed as Executive Secretary, Ms. Boeshans served as the Board's staff attorney.

Amy Ihlan

Staff Attorney. Ms. Ihlan clerked for the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, and for former Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge Marianne Short. Prior to joining the Board, Ms. Ihlan worked for Briol & Benson, PLLC as an attorney and for Macalester College as a visiting associate professor of philosophy.

Mary Pat Maher

Executive Assistant. Prior to joining the Board, Ms. Maher served as Executive Director of Project Remand - Ramsey County Pretrial Services for 26 years, where she collaborated with her justice partners to improve the pretrial justice system in Ramsey County and statewide.