

Senate Bill 2002
House Appropriations Committee
Education and Environment Division

Testimony Presented by Jon J. Jensen
Chief Justice
January 20, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Jon Jensen. I am the Chief Justice of the North Dakota Supreme Court. Sally Holewa, our State Court Administrator will be providing an overview of the major changes in the Judicial Branch appropriation request. Our director of finance, Don Wolf, will be following her to provide the line-item details. They will be able to answer your specific questions. Also attending today's hearing are Justice Lisa Fair McEvers and Justice Douglas Bahr.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and introduce Ms. Holewa and Mr. Wolf. Let me start by saying thank you to the prior legislature for addressing our funding requests for the current budget cycle. In particular, we are grateful for the creation of three new judicial positions in the Northeast Central Judicial District and the East Central Judicial District. Those positions have already been filled and are helping to elevate some of the excess workload placed on the existing judges in those districts.

While Ms. Holewa and Mr. Wolf will be able to answer your specific questions, I would like to highlight five areas of the Judicial Branch budget:

1. The need for judicial salary increases.
2. The 3% adjustment to the compensation grid to regain our competitiveness in the market.
3. The need for the Office of Guardianship and Conservatorship and the necessity of adequate staffing for that Office.
4. The creation of a court navigator position, additional staff for the self-help center, and the creation of an Allied Legal Professional program to address the shortage of attorneys.

5. The funding of an AI driven filing initiative to address current and future staffing needs.

Ms. Holewa and Mr. Wolf will discuss these and the other aspects of the Judicial Branch budget. Thank you and I wish you the best for the current legislative session.