

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF
THE NEBRASKA JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MAY 1, 2026**

Pursuant to the press release issued April 23, 2026, the public hearing of the Nebraska Judicial Resources Commission was held on the 1st day of May 2026, in the Nebraska Supreme Court Courtroom, State Capitol Building, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

AGENDA ITEM I: The Chair called the proceedings to order at approximately 10 a.m. The proceedings included a Zoom videoconferencing option for Commission members. Roll Call by Ashley Jenkins.

PRESENT (* denotes Zoom attendance)

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Judge Travis O’Gorman*
Judge Matthew Kahler*
Jane Langan Mach
Kenneth Hartman
Meagan Spomer*
Jacqueline Tessendorf*
Robert Parker*
Darlene Starman
Nancy McCabe*
Cydnianna Hall*
Maria Whitmore*
Taylor Gage

EXCUSED

Judge Anne Paine
Ron Temple
Roxanne Kracl
Brian Phares

AGENDA ITEM II: The Chair confirmed that all Commission members had received and reviewed the minutes from the February 13, 2026, hearing. On a voice vote the commissioners unanimously accepted the minutes of February 13th.

AGENDA ITEM III: The following exhibits were received and considered by the Commission, and are attached to these minutes:

Exhibit 1: Meeting Agenda

- Exhibit 2: Minutes of the February 13, 2026, hearing
- Exhibit 3: County Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 4: District Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 5: 2021-2026 Judicial Vacancies Data
- Exhibit 6: NSBA Report - Listening Sessions on the Declining Rural Lawyer Population
- Exhibit 7: Number of active members of the bar in each judicial district
- Exhibit 8: Article: The Shrinking Judicial Applicant Pool by Hon. John M. Gerrard.
- Exhibit 9: Maps – Attorneys per county in Nebraska

***Exhibits 8 and 9 received at hearing*

AGENDA ITEM IV: The public hearing was conducted, and the Commission received and considered public testimony from: Chief Justice Funke and Liz Neeley concerning current issues involving judicial vacancies.

AGENDA ITEM V: The Chair noted that the next public hearing of the Judicial Resources Commission will be held on Friday, August 14, 2026, at 10:00am (CST). There being no other matters, the Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:



Justice John R. Freudenberg
Chair

JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION HEARING
Friday, May 1, 2026 – 10 a.m. CST

Exhibit List

This exhibit list is updated as of May 1, 2026.

- Exhibit 1: Meeting Agenda
- Exhibit 2: Minutes of the February 13, 2026, hearing
- Exhibit 3: County Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 4: District Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 5: 2021-2026 Judicial Vacancies Data
- Exhibit 6: NSBA Report - Listening Sessions on the Declining Rural Lawyer Population
- Exhibit 7: Number of active members of the bar in each judicial district
- Exhibit 8: Article: The Shrinking Judicial Applicant Pool by Hon. John M. Gerrard.
- Exhibit 9: Maps – Attorneys per county in Nebraska

****Exhibit 8 and 9 received at hearing**

HEARING AGENDA
JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
Friday, May 1, 2026 – 10 a.m. CST
Supreme Court Courtroom, State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska

- I. Call meeting to order; roll call of members.
- II. Approve minutes from JRC meeting held February 13, 2026.
- III. Identify/receive exhibits to be considered by commission during public hearing.
- IV. Conduct public hearing concerning the following:
 - a. Chief Justice Funke presentation/discussion concerning judicial vacancies.
- V. Adjourn

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF
THE NEBRASKA JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 13, 2026**

Pursuant to the press release issued January 30, 2026, the public hearing of the Nebraska Judicial Resources Commission was held on the 13th day of February 2026, in the Nebraska Supreme Court Courtroom, State Capitol Building, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

AGENDA ITEM I: The Chair called the proceedings to order at approximately 10 a.m. The proceedings included a Zoom videoconferencing option for Commission members. Roll Call by Ashley Jenkins.

PRESENT (* denotes Zoom attendance)

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Judge Travis O’Gorman*
Judge Anne Paine*
Judge Matthew Kahler*
Kenneth Hartman
Ron Temple*
Jacqueline Tessendorf*
Robert Parker*
Darlene Starman
Nancy McCabe
Roxanne Kracl*
Maria Whitmore*
Brian Phares*
Taylor Gage

EXCUSED

Jane Langan Mach
Meagan Spomer
Cydnianna Hall

AGENDA ITEM II: The Chair confirmed that all Commission members had received and reviewed the minutes from the November 21, 2025, hearing. On a voice vote the commissioners unanimously accepted the minutes of November 21st.

AGENDA ITEM III: The following exhibits were received and considered by the Commission, and are attached to these minutes:

- Exhibit 1: Meeting Agenda
- Exhibit 2: Minutes of the November 21, 2025, hearing
- Exhibit 3: Retirement letter from Judge Jodi L. Nelson, District Court Judge, 3rd Judicial District, dated December 4, 2025
- Exhibit 4: Press release from Governor Pillen appointing Judge Derek R. Vaughn, District Court Judge, 4th Judicial District, as Associate Supreme Court Justice dated November 10, 2025
- Exhibit 5: Retirement letter from Judge Donna Farrell Taylor, County Court Judge, 7th Judicial District, dated January 16, 2026
- Exhibit 6: Resignation letter from Judge Arthur S. Wetzel, County Court Judge, 9th Judicial District, dated October 2, 2025
- Exhibit 7: Retirement letter from Judge James M. Worden, County Court Judge, 12th Judicial District, dated November 21, 2025
- Exhibit 8: County Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 9: District Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 10: Letter from Judge LeAnne M. Srb dated November 10, 2025, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 4th Judicial District, District Court
- Exhibit 11: Letter from Judge Alfred E. Corey, III, dated January 30, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 12: Letter from Hon. John M. Gerrard, NSBA President, dated February 9, 2026, re: NSBA Judicial Resources Committee recommendations
- Exhibit 13: Letter from Judge James M. Worden dated February 2, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 12th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 14: Letter from Judge Aaron J. Conn dated February 10, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 12th Judicial District, County Court

- Exhibit 15: Letter from Vicky A. Kenney (undated) re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 16: Letter from Benjamin W. Shanahan (undated) re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 17: Letter from Marty Klein dated February 12, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court

AGENDA ITEM IV: The public hearing was conducted, and the Commission received and considered public testimony from: Judge Bryan S. McQuay, 9th District, County Court; Judge Kristen D. Mickey, 12th District, County Court; and Corey Steel, State Court Administrator.

(a): It was moved by Brian Phares and seconded by Darlene Starman to declare a judicial vacancy in the District Court, 3rd Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge Jodi L. Nelson, with the primary location being Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

(b): It was moved by Ken Hartman and seconded by Nancy McCabe to declare a judicial vacancy in the District Court, 4th Judicial District, due to the appointment of Judge Derek R. Vaughn to the Supreme Court, with the primary location being Omaha, Douglas County, Nebraska. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

(c) It was moved by Ron Temple and seconded by Taylor Gage to declare a judicial vacancy in the County Court, 7th Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge Donna Farrell Taylor, with the primary location to be determined in consultation with the successful applicant. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

(d) It was moved by Maria Whitmore and seconded by Darlene Starman to declare a judicial vacancy in the County Court, 9th Judicial District, due to the resignation of Judge Arthur S. Wetzel, with the primary location being Grand Island, Hall County, Nebraska. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

(e) It was moved by Maria Whitmore and seconded by Judge Anne Paine to declare a judicial vacancy in the County Court, 12th Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge James M. Worden, with the primary location being Gering, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM V: The Chair noted that the next public hearing of the Judicial Resources Commission will be held on Friday, May 1, 2026, at 10:00am (CST).

AGENDA ITEM VI: There being no other matters, the Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Freudenberg", written in a cursive style.

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Chair

JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION HEARING
Friday, February 13, 2026 – 10 a.m. CST

Exhibit List

This exhibit list is updated as of February 13, 2026, and will continue to be updated as more information is received.

- Exhibit 1: Meeting Agenda
- Exhibit 2: Minutes of the November 21, 2025, hearing
- Exhibit 3: Retirement letter from Judge Jodi L. Nelson, District Court Judge, 3rd Judicial District, dated December 4, 2025
- Exhibit 4: Press release from Governor Pilleen appointing Judge Derek R. Vaughn, District Court Judge, 4th Judicial District, as Associate Supreme Court Justice dated November 10, 2025
- Exhibit 5: Retirement letter from Judge Donna Farrell Taylor, County Court Judge, 7th Judicial District, dated January 16, 2026
- Exhibit 6: Resignation letter from Judge Arthur S. Wetzel, County Court Judge, 9th Judicial District, dated October 2, 2025
- Exhibit 7: Retirement letter from Judge James M. Worden, County Court Judge, 12th Judicial District, dated November 21, 2025
- Exhibit 8: County Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 9: District Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 10: Letter from Judge LeAnne M. Srb dated November 10, 2025, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 4th Judicial District, District Court
- Exhibit 11: Letter from Judge Alfred E. Corey, III, dated January 30, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 12: Letter from Hon. John M. Gerrard, NSBA President, dated February 9, 2026, re: NSBA Judicial Resources Committee recommendations
- Exhibit 13: Letter from Judge James M. Worden dated February 2, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 12th Judicial District, County Court

- Exhibit 14: Letter from Judge Aaron J. Conn dated February 10, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 12th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 15: Letter from Vicky A. Kenney (undated) re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 16: Letter from Benjamin W. Shanahan (undated) re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court
- Exhibit 17: Letter from Marty Klein dated February 12, 2026, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 9th Judicial District, County Court

HEARING AGENDA
JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
Friday, February 13, 2026 – 10 a.m. CST
Supreme Court Courtroom, State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska

- I. Call meeting to order; roll call of members.
- II. Approve minutes from JRC Annual meeting held November 21, 2025.
- III. Identify/receive exhibits to be considered by commission during public hearing.
- IV. Conduct public hearing concerning the following:
 - a. Whether a judicial vacancy exists in the office of the District Court, 3rd Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge Jodi L. Nelson, and if so, whether to recommend a primary office location.
 - b. Whether a judicial vacancy exists in the office of the District Court, 4th Judicial District, due to the appointment of Judge Derek Vaughn to the Supreme Court, and if so, whether to recommend a primary office location.
 - c. Whether a judicial vacancy exists in the office of the County Court, 7th Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge Donna Farrell Taylor, and if so, whether to recommend a primary office location.
 - d. Whether a judicial vacancy exists in the office of the County Court, 9th Judicial District, due to the resignation of Judge Arthur S. Wetzel, and if so, whether to recommend a primary office location.
 - e. Whether a judicial vacancy exists in the office of the County Court, 12th Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge James M. Worden, and if so, whether to recommend a primary office location.
- V. Adjourn

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF
THE NEBRASKA JUDICIAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
November 21, 2025**

Pursuant to the press release issued November 7, 2025, the Annual Meeting and public hearing of the Nebraska Judicial Resources Commission was held on the 21st day of November 2025, in the Nebraska Supreme Court Courtroom, State Capitol Building, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

AGENDA ITEM I: The Chair called the proceedings to order at approximately 10 a.m. The proceedings included a Zoom videoconferencing option for Commission members. Roll Call by Ashley Jenkins.

PRESENT (* denotes Zoom attendance)

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Judge Travis O’Gorman*
Judge Anne Paine
Judge Matthew Kahler
Jane Langan Mach
Kenneth Hartman
Ron Temple*
Meagan Spomer*
Jacqueline Tessendorf
Robert Parker
Darlene Starman
Nancy McCabe*
Roxanne Kracl
Cydnianna Hall*
Maria Whitmore
Brian Phares*
Taylor Gage

EXCUSED

Robert Parker
Roxanne Kracl

AGENDA ITEM II: The Chair confirmed that all Commission members had received and reviewed the minutes from the August 15, 2025, hearing. On an informal voice vote the commissioners unanimously accepted the minutes of August 15th.

AGENDA ITEM III: The following exhibits were received and considered by the Commission, and are attached to these minutes:

- Exhibit 1: Meeting Agenda
- Exhibit 2: Minutes of the August 15, 2025, hearing
- Exhibit 3: Retirement letter from Judge C. Jo Petersen dated August 1, 2025
- Exhibit 4: Resignation letter from Judge James G. Kube dated October 1, 2025
- Exhibit 5: District Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 6: County Courts Weighted Caseload Report Fiscal Year 2025
- Exhibit 7: Judicial Resources Commission Supportive Data for 2025 Annual Meeting
- Exhibit 8: Judicial Retirement Forecast
- Exhibit 9: Other Factors Affecting Judicial Resources
- Exhibit 10: Letter from Saunders County Bar Association dated November 13, 2025, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 5th Judicial District, County Court.
- Exhibit 11: Letter from Catrina K. Harris dated November 13, 2025, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 5th Judicial District, County Court.
- Exhibit 12: Letter from Hon. John M. Gerrard, NSBA President, dated November 13, 2025, re: NSBA Judicial Resources Committee recommendations.

Exhibit 13: Letter from Judge Stephen R.W. Twiss dated November 18, 2025, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 5th Judicial District, County Court.

Exhibit 14: Letter from Christopher M. Johnson dated November 19, 2025, re: request to declare judicial vacancy – 5th Judicial District, County Court.

AGENDA ITEM IV: The public hearing was conducted, and the Commission received and considered public testimony from: Judge Stephen R. Twiss, 5th District, County Court; Amy Prenda, Deputy State Court Administrator; Bill Mueller, Nebraska State Bar Association; and Hazel Delgado, Director of Research and Data.

(a): It was moved by Jacqueline Tessoroff and seconded by Judge Anne Paine to declare a judicial vacancy in the County Court, 5th Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge C. Jo Petersen, with the primary office location being Seward, Seward County, Nebraska. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

(b): It was moved by Judge Matthew Kahler and seconded by Meagan Spomer to declare a judicial vacancy in the District Court, 7th Judicial District, due to the resignation of Judge James G. Kube, with the primary office location to be determined in consultation with the successful applicant. On a roll call vote the motion passed unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM V: Annual Meeting topics under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-1205:

(a): The Commission took up whether it is appropriate to recommend adding a judgeship in any judicial district. No motions were made on this issue.

(b): The Commission took up whether it is appropriate to recommend reducing a judgeship in any judicial district. No motions were made on this issue.

(c): The Commission took up whether to recommend any judicial district boundaries, or number of judicial districts, should be changed

for the district or county courts. No motions were made on this issue.

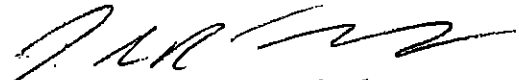
(d): The Commission took up whether to make any recommendations for the more balanced use of existing judicial resources. No motions were made on this issue.

AGENDA ITEM VI: 2026 quarterly meeting dates:

(a): The Chair advised the Commission of the dates for the 2026 meetings: February 13, May 1, August 14, and November 20.

AGENDA ITEM VII: There being no other matters, the Judicial Resources Commission hearing was adjourned by the Chair.

Respectfully submitted:



Justice John R. Freudentberg
Chair

KRISTIN D. CEBALLOS
Bailliff

JODI L. NELSON
DISTRICT JUDGE
THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT
THE JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT CENTER
575 SOUTH 10TH
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA 68508
PHONE 402-441-7371 FAX 402-441-3833

ANDREA SEEFUS
Court Reporter

RECEIVED

DEC 15 2025

Office of the Chief Justice

Governor Jim Pillen
1445 K Street
Lincoln, NE 68508

December 4, 2025

Dear Governor Pillen,

Twenty years ago this month I accepted then-Governor Dave Heineman's appointment to be a district court judge for the Third Judicial District, namely, Lancaster County. I write today to announce that I will retire, effective January 31, 2026.

It has been an absolute honor, distinct privilege, and highlight of my career to have had this opportunity to serve the citizens of Lancaster County and the State of Nebraska as a district court judge. I have loved this job. It has been such a joy to work with my colleagues on the bench both here in Lancaster County and throughout the state, as well as the talented lawyers who have practiced before me. Without a doubt, they are some of the most hard-working, conscientious, and dedicated people you could find anywhere.

I have also been fortunate to spend my career working with my amazing court staff, or better said, my court family. Each day they have worked hard to serve those that utilize the court with efficiency, grace, and professionalism. I owe them a debt of gratitude for their service. I could not have done this job without them.

Respectfully,



Jodi L. Nelson

District Court Judge

cc: Chief Justice, Jeffrey J. Funke

Gov. Pillen Appoints Derek Vaughn as Associate Supreme Court Justice

November 10, 2025

CONTACT:

Laura Strimple, (402) 580-9495

Gov. Pillen Appoints Derek Vaughn as Associate Supreme Court Justice

LINCOLN, NE – Today, Governor Jim Pillen announced his appointment of the Honorable Derek Ray Vaughn of Omaha to the Nebraska Supreme Court, representing the Second Judicial District. His appointment fills the vacancy left by Justice Miller-Lerman who stepped down Oct. 31 after 33 years of service.

"Judge Vaughn has notable experience as a judge and as a prosecutor," said Gov. Pillen. "He has a heart for the Omaha community and a long-standing history of public service. His integrity and commitment to the law are evident and I'm pleased to promote him to this role on the Nebraska Supreme Court."

Standing next to his wife Jacqueline, his children Raionna and Darius, and other family members including his mother Shirley, Justice Vaughn offered his profound appreciation.

"I'm grateful to Gov. Pillen for this amazing opportunity," said Justice Vaughn. "I look forward to continuing my service to the people of Nebraska."

Since August 2023, Justice Vaughn has been a district court judge in Douglas County. Prior to that, he was a county court judge for 10 years, also in Douglas County. He spent several years in the Douglas County Attorney's Office, handling criminal and civil cases as well as a considerable caseload for the county's problem-solving courts.

Justice Vaughn has been an adjunct instructor at several regional colleges and universities including the University of Nebraska – Omaha (UNO), Midland University and Dana College. He has served on a number of boards including the City of Omaha Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the Urban League of Nebraska Board of Directors, the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice and the Office of Violence Prevention Advisory Board.

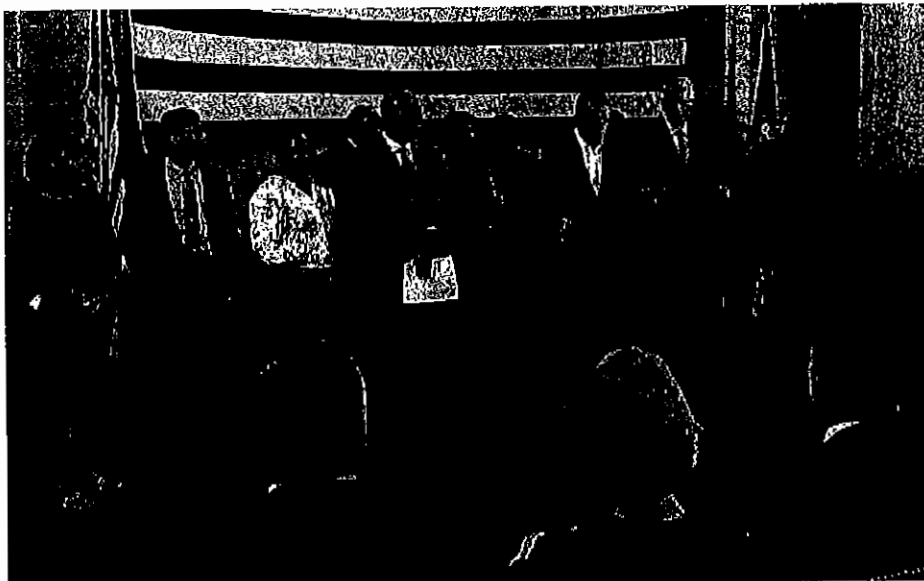
Justice Vaughn is part of the Nebraska Bench Media Committee, which works to foster positive and professional relationships between attorneys, courts and the media. He is also involved with the Salem Baptist Church and is a coordinator for the Zion Baptist Church Wild Game Feast.

During today's announcement, Lieutenant Governor Joe Kelly talked about his longstanding friendship with Justice Vaughn, which began more than 20 years ago when they were both prosecutors. Lt. Gov. Kelly highlighted a few of the things that made Justice Vaughn a great fit for the state Supreme Court -- one of those being Justice Vaughn's love of community and things he did "off of the bench."

"He's a people person," continued Lt. Gov. Kelly. "He likes to meet people, he likes to learn about what they're doing, what they're up to and he listens. Listening is a great part of the job."

Justice Vaughn has a bachelor's degree in secondary education and earned his juris doctor from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) College of Law.

The Nebraska Supreme Court Second Judicial District consists of Douglas County.



ANTELOPE COUNTY COURT

DONNA FARRELL TAYLOR
COUNTY JUDGE

KRISTINA SEHI
CLERK MAGISTRATE

Seventh Judicial District
501 MAIN STREET
PO BOX 26 NELIGH, NE 68756
Phone (402) 887-4650
Fax (402) 887-4160

ROSS A. STOFFER
COUNTY JUDGE

January 16, 2026

The Honorable Jim Pillen
Governor of the State of Nebraska
P.O Box 94848
Lincoln, NE 68509-4848

Re: Notice of Judicial Retirement-Judge Donna Farrell Taylor-County Judge 7th District

Dear Governor Pillen:

Please accept this letter as official notice of my intended retirement from the County Bench of the 7th Judicial District. It has been my distinct pleasure to have served the citizens of the State of Nebraska for nearly 25 years. I am so grateful for the opportunity Governor Johanns provided by having the confidence to appoint me.

My last day of service will be February 11, 2026.

My work has been aided by the professional and loyal service of our Clerk Magistrates and court staff, both past and present. Over the years, we have weathered together many challenges and changes in how our service to the people is administered.

The camaraderie of my fellow judges in the 7th judicial district and all of the County Judges of the State of Nebraska have provided friendship, support and a feeling of solidarity in a profession that can be isolating.

The professionalism and expertise of our attorneys and attorneys visiting our judicial district make me proud to be a member of the 7th judicial district bench and bar.

The opportunity to serve the families and litigants appearing before me reminds me time over time that we are a diverse people, and each litigant brings his or her own uniqueness to the court system, enriching my experience as a judge and growth as a person.

All of this I will miss as I enter the next phase of my life.

Sincerely,

Donna Farrell Taylor

COUNTY COURT, DISTRICT NINE

Hall County Courthouse

111 W. 1st St., Suite #1

Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

Phone :(308)385-5135 Fax :(308)385-5138 TDD :(800)833-7352

Judges

Arthur S. Wetzel

Alfred E. Corey III

Bryan S. McQuay

Gerald R. Jorgensen

John P. Rademacher

Clerk Magistrate

Stephanie R. Smith

RECEIVED

OCT -6 2025

Office of the Chief Justice

October 2, 2025

Governor Jim Pillen

1445 K Street

Lincoln, NE 68508

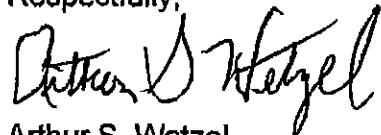
Dear Governor Pillen,

I wish to notify you of my resignation as County Court Judge for the Ninth Judicial District. My last day will be January 2, 2026. I am ready for retirement; however, it has been a pleasure and honor to serve the Ninth Judicial District and specifically, Hall County.

I was appointed by Governor Heineman in 2011. One of my greatest experiences has been the ability to work with various clerk magistrates, clerk staff, bailiffs, and other court personnel. As to Hall County, I can ensure you that these are very dedicated employees who make the system run. It has been an honor to work with them.

I have obviously met various county judges and district judges throughout the years who are dedicated to the citizens that they serve. Thank you for receiving this letter and I hope for your continued support of our state judiciary.

Respectfully,



Arthur S. Wetzel

cc: Chief Justice Jeffrey Funke
Corey Steele

COUNTY JUDGES
KRISTEN D MICKEY
JAMES M WORDEN

CLERK MAGISTRATE
DIANNE LANA



SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY COURT
TWELFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

November 21, 2025

The Honorable Jim Pillen
Governor of the State of Nebraska
1445 K Street
P.O. Box 94848
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Governor Pillen,

It has been an honor to serve as a county judge in the Twelfth Judicial District the last 21 years.

I cannot envision a job comparable to that of a county judge in the Panhandle of Nebraska. I have seen the best and worst of people. I have tried to be diligent and just in the administration of my duties.

I would like to thank the incredible Scotts Bluff County Court team. They are a second to none.

Finally, I would like to provide a word of encouragement; the county court bench is comprised of judges that care deeply about the people they serve and laws they are bound to enforce.

Please accept this letter of retirement effective February 9, 2026.

Sincerely;

James M. Worden
Scotts Bluff County Judge

SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY COURT
1725 10TH STREET
GERING, NE 69341

County Courts

Weighted Caseload Report



Fiscal Year 2025

July 1, 2024, to
June 30, 2025

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Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska County Courts Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska has a district court in each of its 93 counties, organized into 12 Judicial Districts. Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-301.02, the Legislature determines the number of district court judges who serve in each judicial district, and the geographic boundaries of each judicial district. An objective assessment of judicial workload allows informed decisions about district boundaries and the number of judges needed to timely resolve the cases in each judicial district.

To assist in evaluating judicial workloads, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-1007(1) requires the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOC) to compile judicial workload statistics based on caseloads weighted by category of case. These weighted caseload statistics are used by the Judicial Branch, the Judicial Resources Commission, and the Legislature to evaluate judicial need, and guide decisions and recommendations on how best to allocate judicial resources across the state.

To ensure the validity, uniformity and accuracy of the AOC's judicial workload statistics, a statewide judicial time study was conducted in 2019-2020 under the direction and leadership of the National Center for State Courts. For a full description of the judicial time study and the recommended weighting methodology and standards, see *Nebraska Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report (October 2020)* (this is noted on tables in this report with an asterisk) on the Nebraska Supreme Court Website. Because this Weighted Caseload Report uses the methodology and standards from the 2020 workload assessment, direct comparison to archived reports is not recommended.

Weighted caseload statistics approximate the number of judges a district needs to handle the current caseload based upon the calculations of a three-year rolling average of case filing data. Therefore, when weighted caseload statistics are examined in conjunction with other compelling and critical metrics, they provide a vital part of an objective and standardized assessment of judicial needs and the fair allocation of judicial resources across juvenile courts in the State of Nebraska.



Corey R. Steel

Nebraska State Court Administrator

Nebraska Supreme Court

Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation

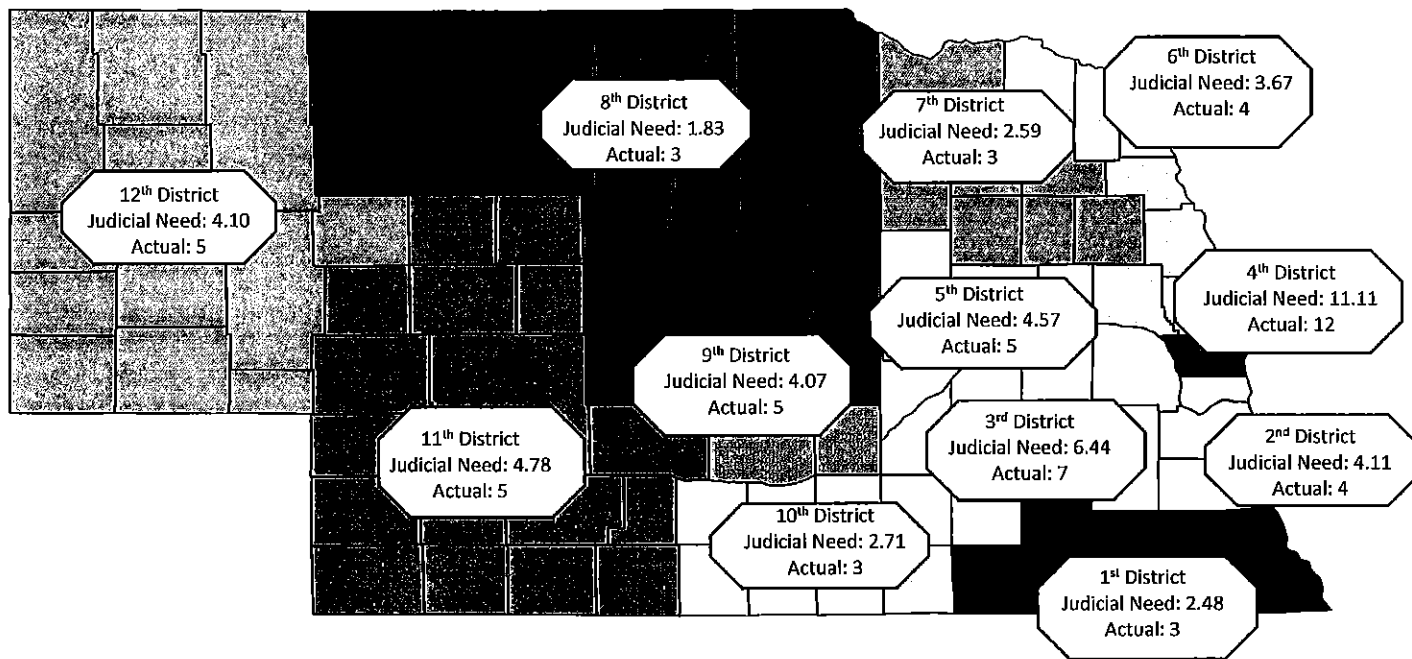
Rm. 1211 State Capitol | P.O. Box 98910 | Lincoln, NE 68509

T 402.471.3730 | F 402.471.2197

www.supremecourt.nebraska.gov

Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska County Court Judicial Needs Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)



Note: Differences between the total District Court Need for Judges and the sum of individual counties is due to rounding to the nearest one-hundredth.

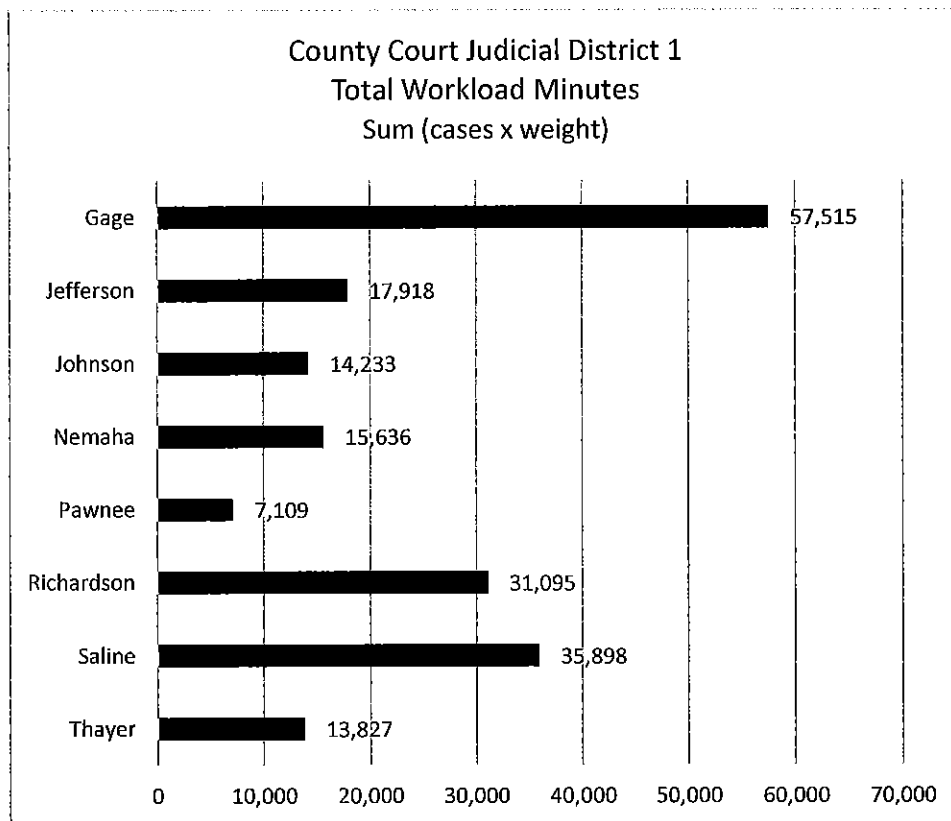
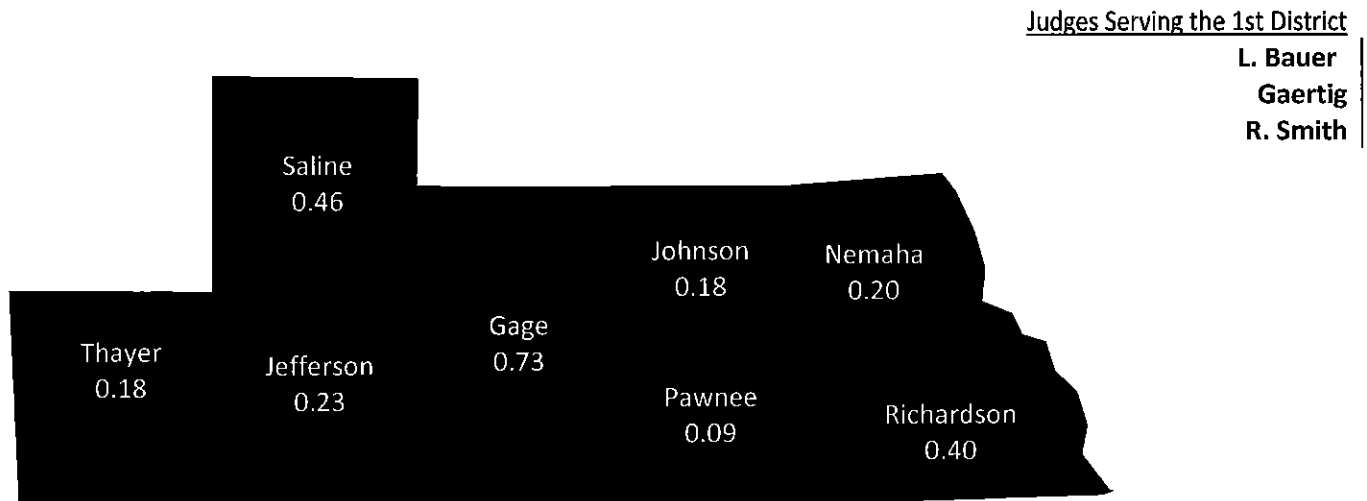
Weighted Caseload Report

1st Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 2.48
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.83

NOTE: An additional **0.01** is given due to Judge R. Smith being assigned to Problem-Solving Court cases in Fillmore County (District Court) and Otoe County (District Court).

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Weighted Caseload Report

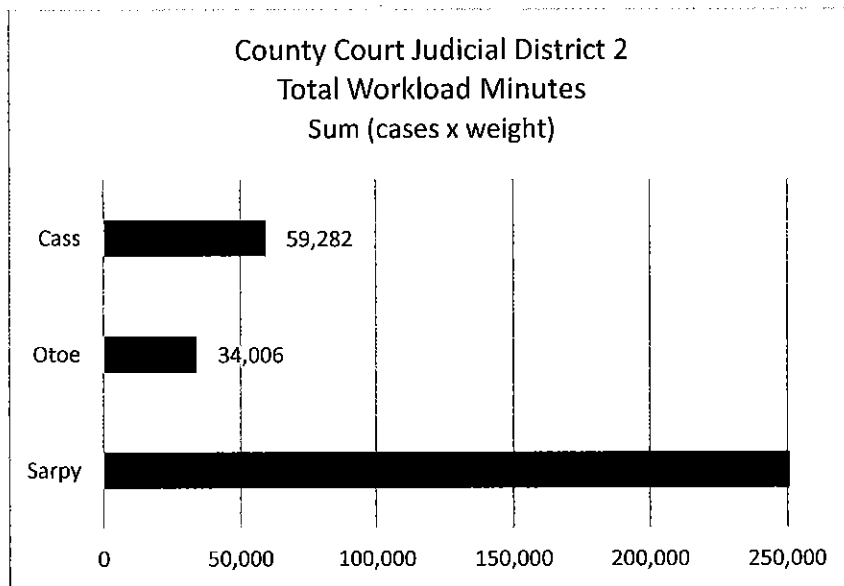
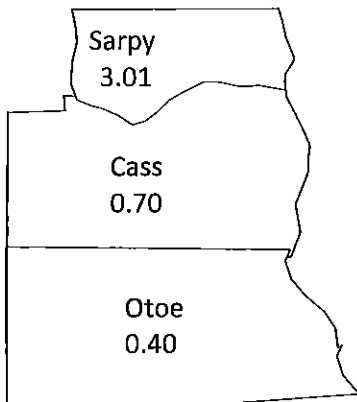
2nd Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 4.11
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 1.03

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 2nd District

Freeman
 Hutton
 Palm
 Partsch



Weighted Caseload Report

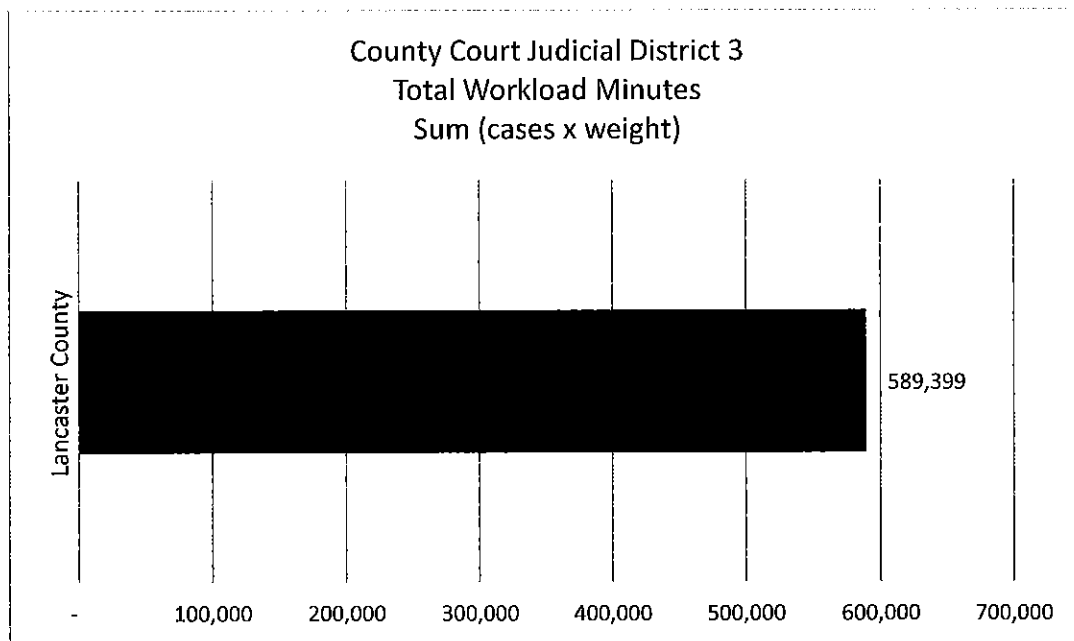
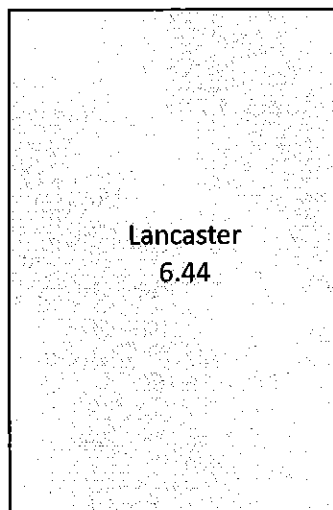
3rd Judicial District –County Court

County court need for judges: 6.44
 Current number of judges: 7
 Workload per judge: 0.92

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 3rd District

- Acton
- Dalton
- Parsley
- Phillips
- Reuter
- Yardley
- Zimmerman



Weighted Caseload Report

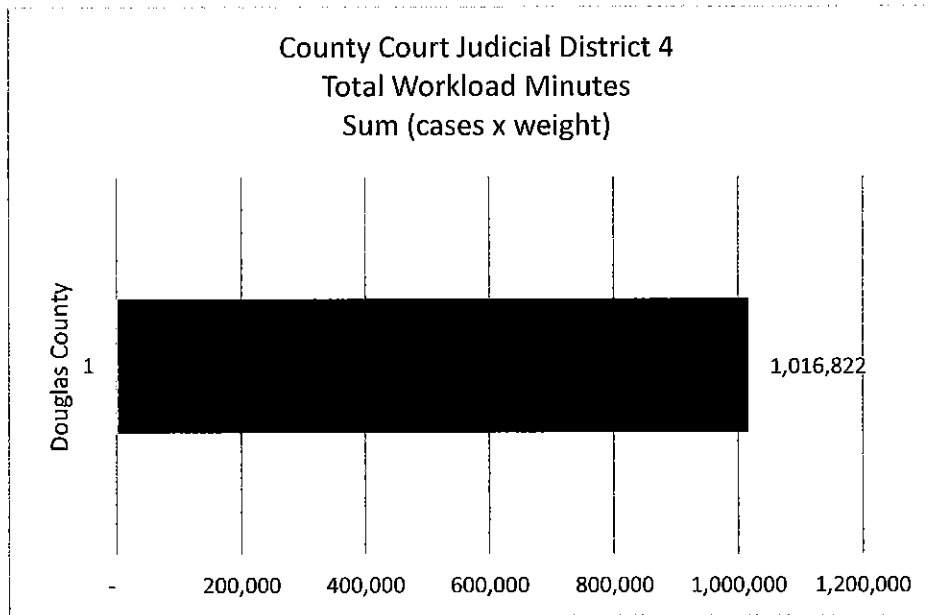
4th Judicial District –County Court

County court need for judges: 11.11
 Current number of judges: 12
 Workload per judge: 0.93

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 4th District

- Finley
- Forsberg
- Hansen
- Harmon
- Hendrix
- Huber
- Keim
- Kleine (Marcuzzo)
- Lohaus
- McDermott
- Mosby (Lowe)
- Shearer

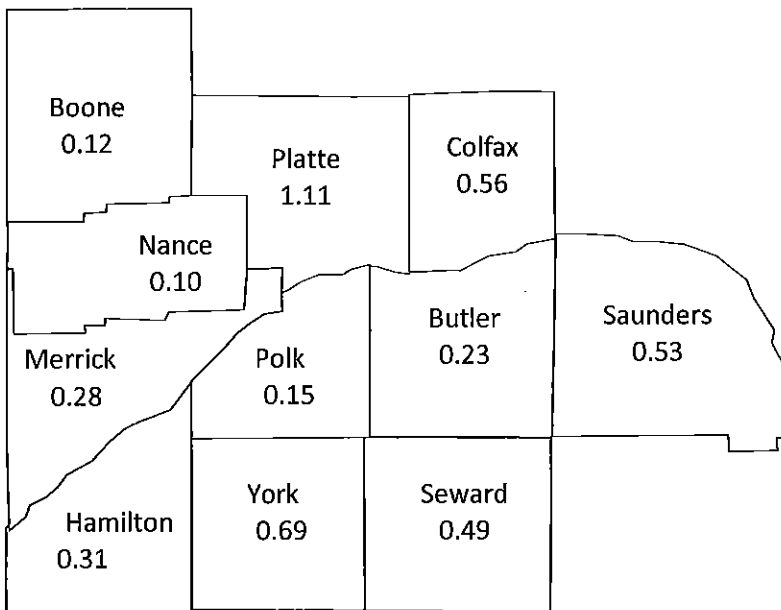


Weighted Caseload Report

5th Judicial District - County Court

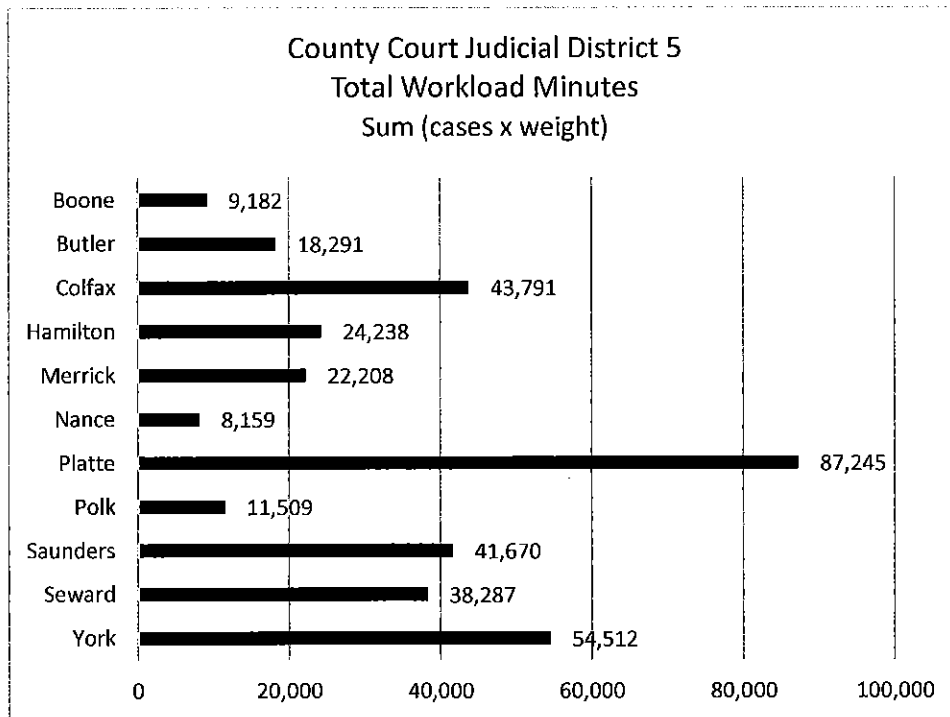
County court need for judges: 4.57
 Current number of judges: 5
 Workload per judge: 0.91

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 5th District

- Homolka
- Kracl
- Lange
- Petersen
- Twiss

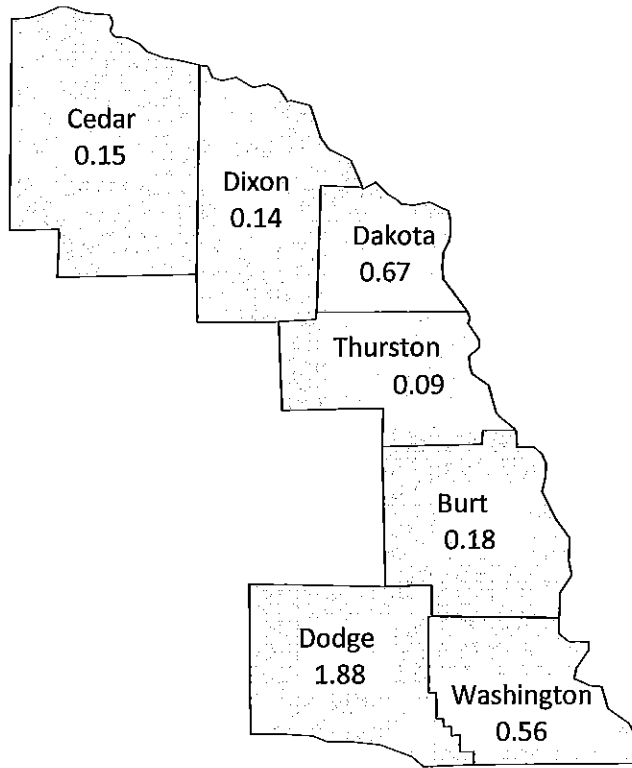


Weighted Caseload Report

6th Judicial District – County Court

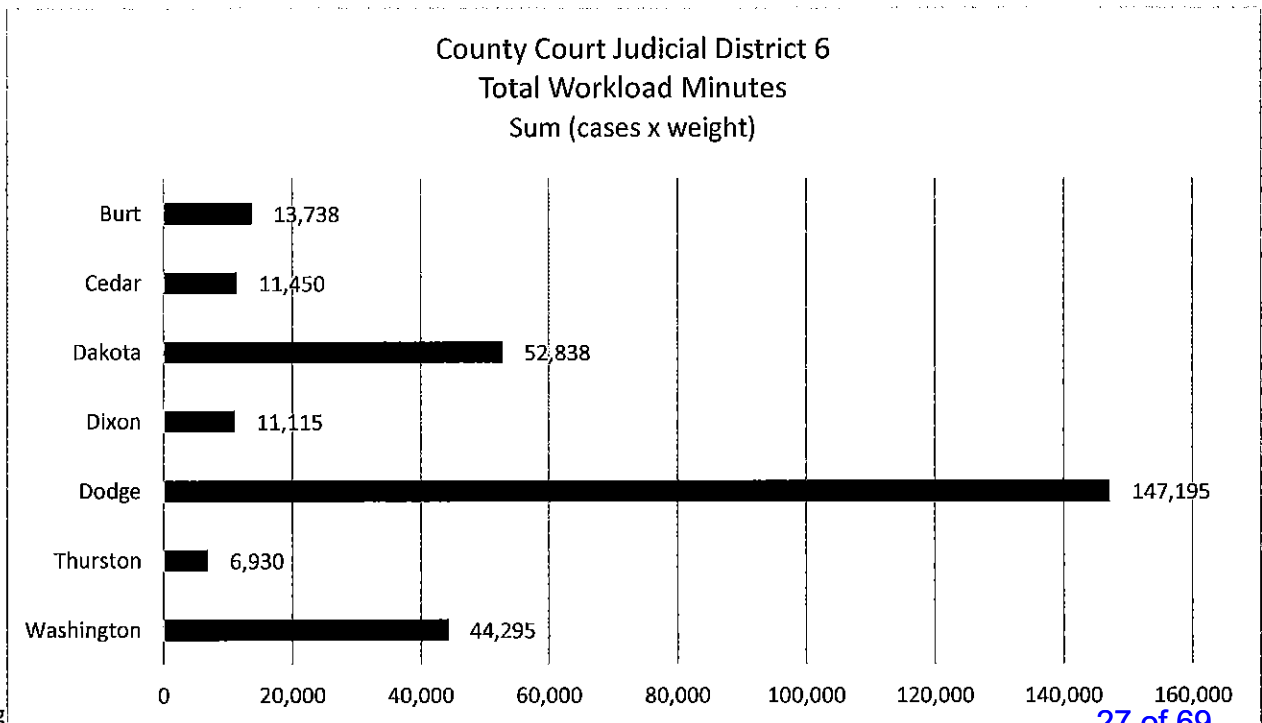
County court need for judges: 3.67
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.92

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 6th District

Barron
 S. Bauer
 Klein
 Matney

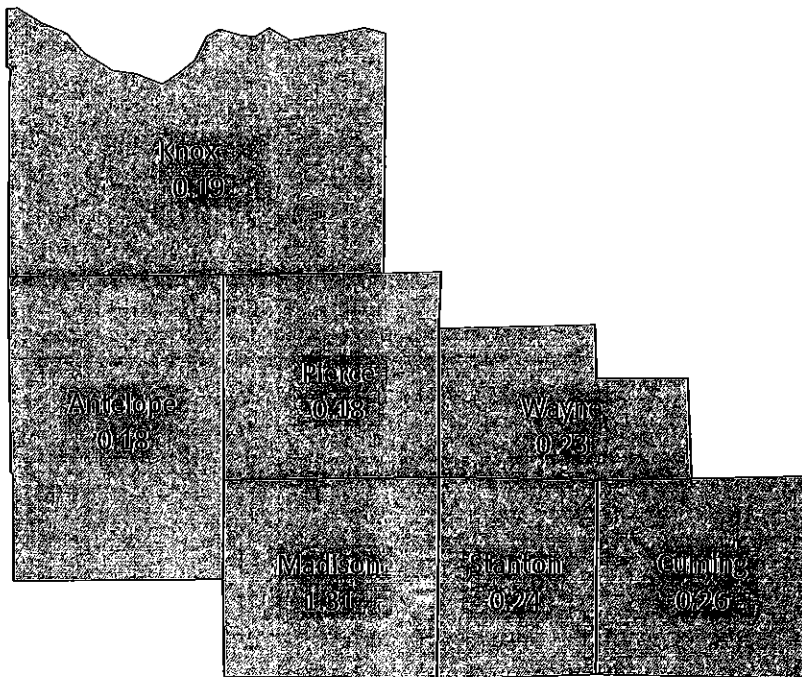


Weighted Caseload Report

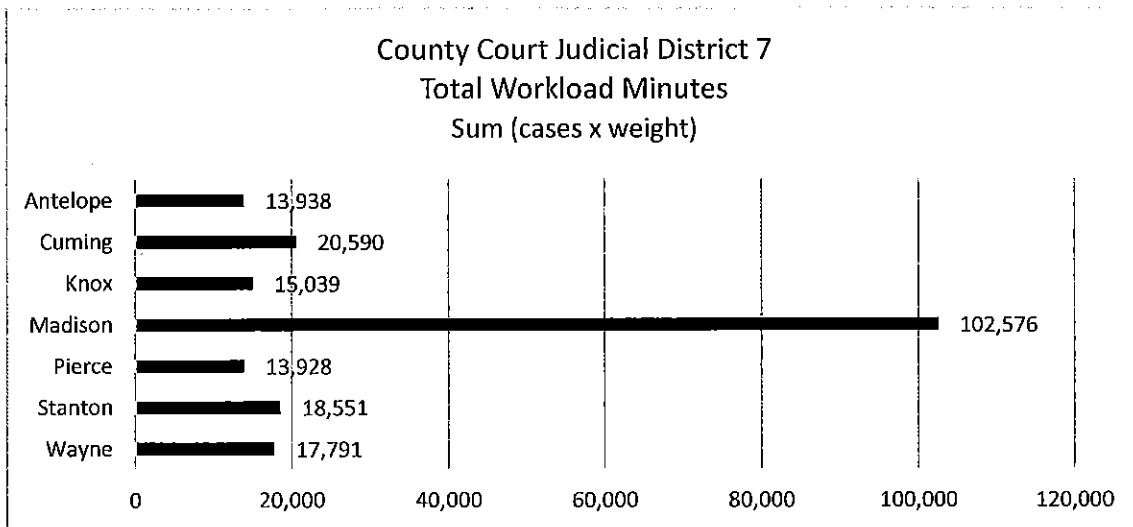
7th Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 2.59
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.86

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 7th District
 Vacant (Long)
 Stoffer
 Taylor



Weighted Caseload Report

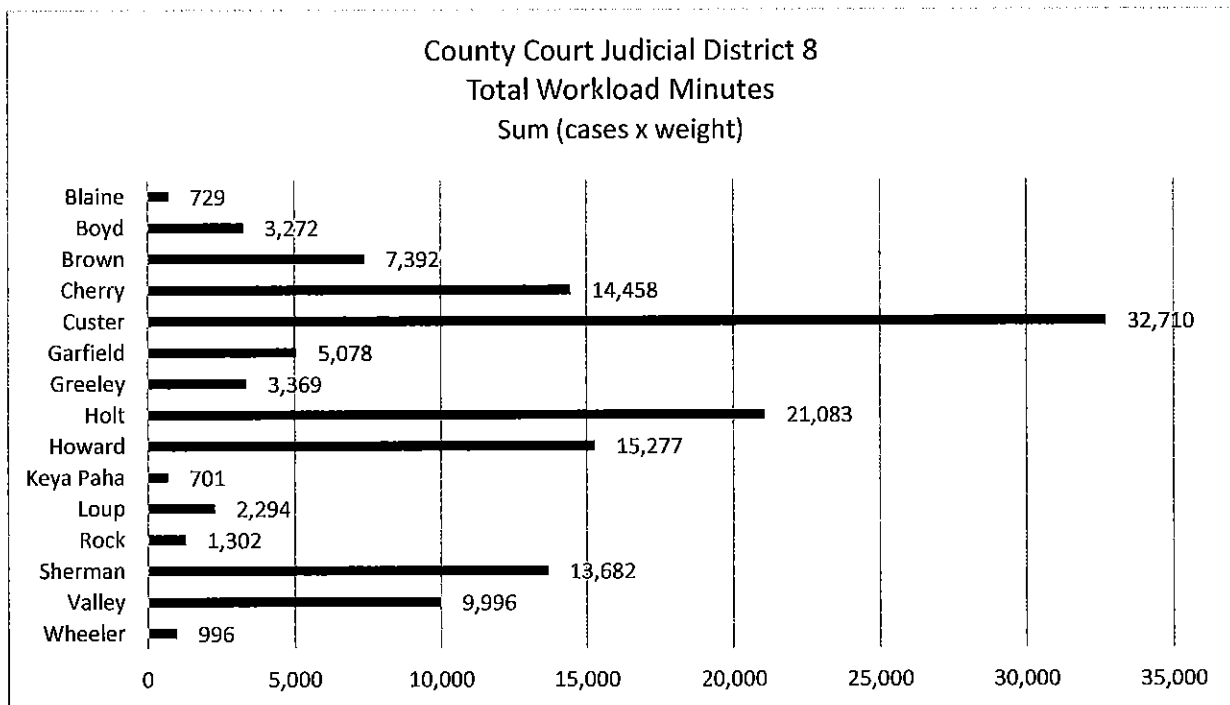
8th Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 1.83
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.61

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Predicted judicial resources need by county				Judges Serving the 8th District	
Cherry	0.20	Keya Paha	0.01	Boyd	0.05
		Brown	0.10	Rock	0.02
				Holt	0.29
		Blaine	0.01	Loup	0.03
				Garfield	0.07
				Wheeler	0.01
				Valley	0.14
		Custer	0.45	Greeley	0.05
				Sherman	0.19
				Howard	0.21

Judges Serving the 8th District:
 Burdick
 Orr
 Schendt

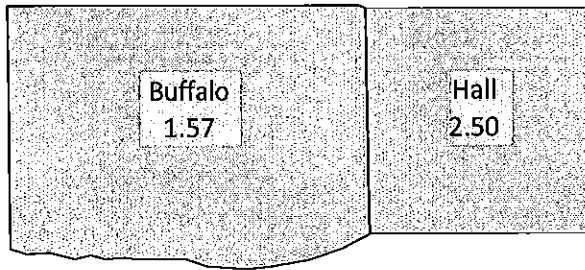


Weighted Caseload Report

9th Judicial District – County Court

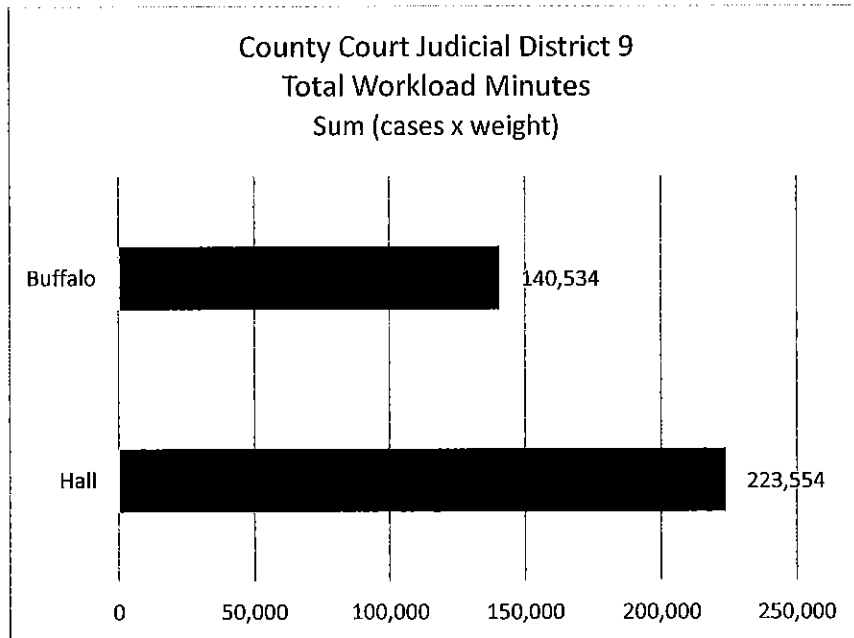
County court need for judges: 4.07
Current number of judges: 5
Workload per judge: 0.81

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 9th District

Corey
Jorgensen
McQuay
Rademacher
Wetzel



Weighted Caseload Report

10th Judicial District – County Court

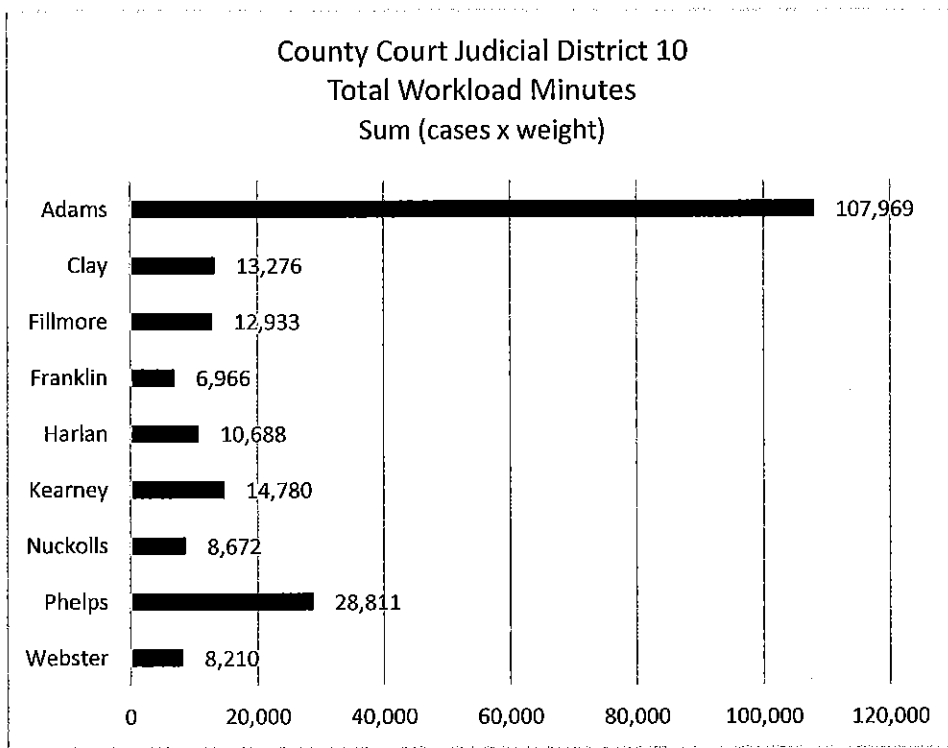
County court need for judges: 2.71
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.90

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 10th District

Burns
 Mead
 Nelsen-Pacey (Hoeft)

Phelps 0.37	Kearney 0.19	Adams 1.38	Clay 0.17	Fillmore 0.16
Harlan 0.14	Franklin 0.09	Webster 0.10	Nuckolls 0.11	

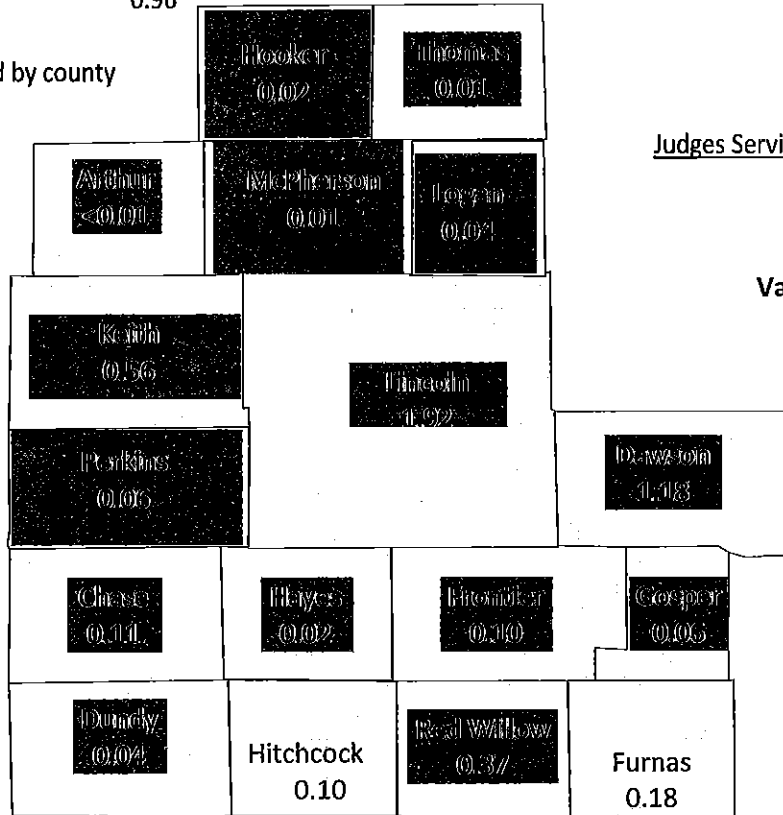


Weighted Caseload Report

11th Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 4.78
 Current number of judges: 5
 Workload per judge: 0.96

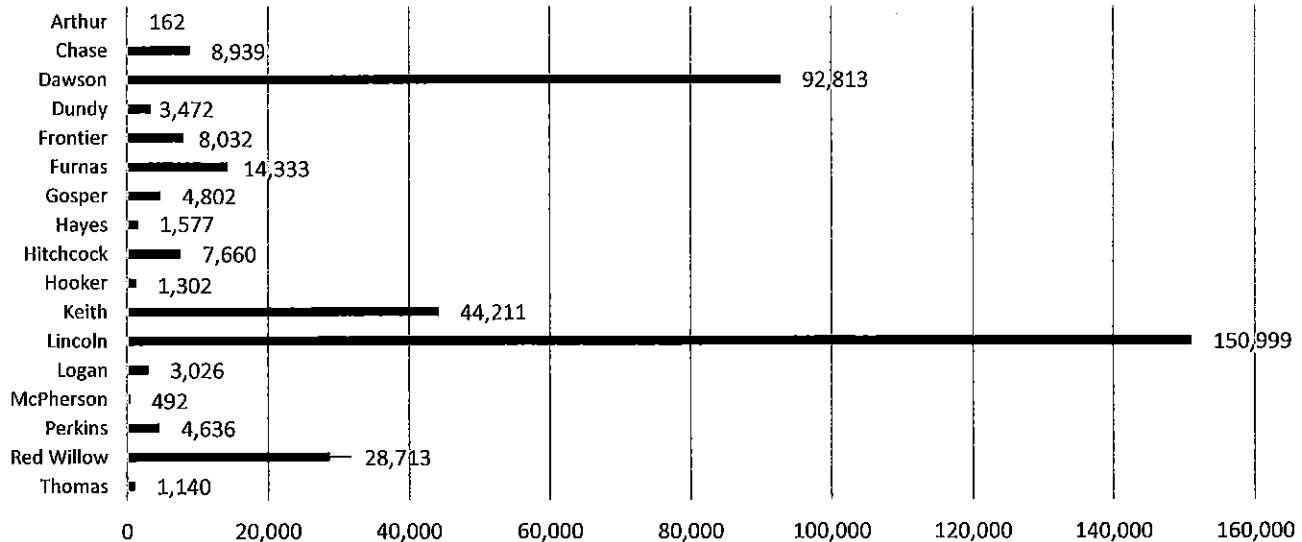
Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 11th District

- Jay
- Paine
- Roberts-Connick
- Vacant (Steenburg)
- Wightman

County Court Judicial District 11
 Total Workload Minutes
 Sum (cases x weight)

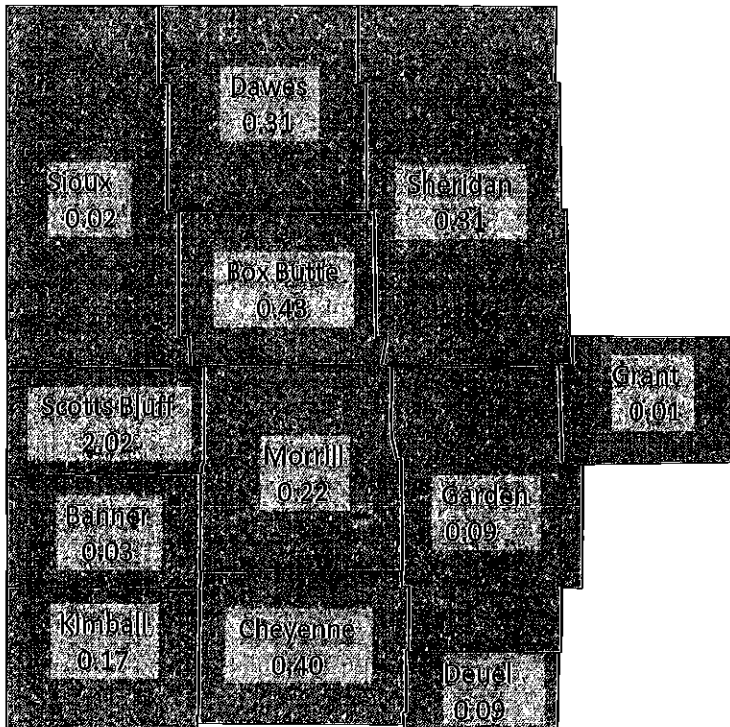


Weighted Caseload Report

12th Judicial District – County Court

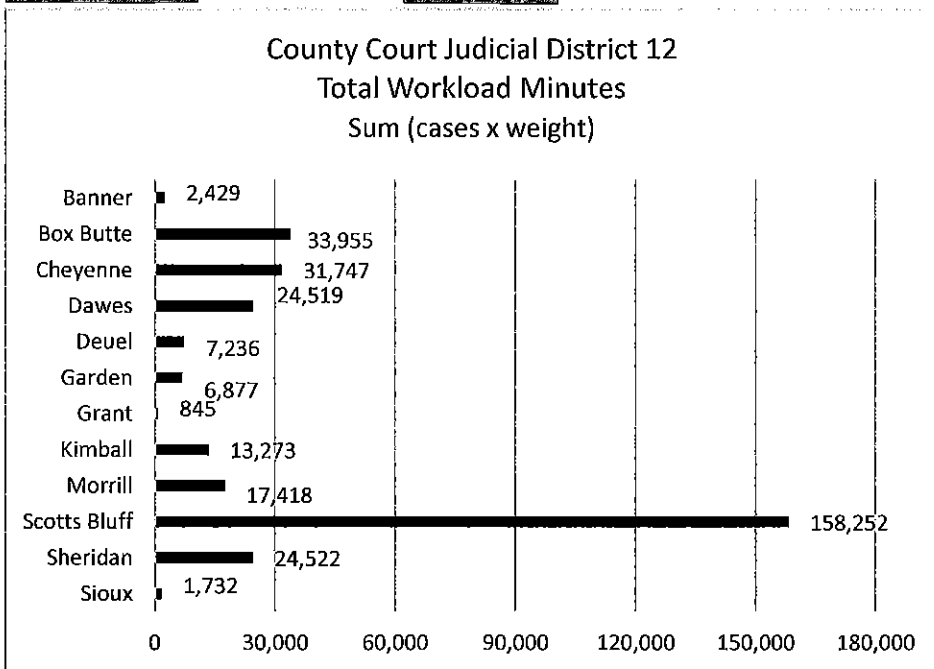
County court need for judges: 4.10
 Current number of judges: 5
 Workload per judge: 0.82

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 12th District

- Conn
- Mickey
- Roland
- Wess
- Worden



Weighted Caseload Report

Court Case Type Categories and Weights – Appendix

District Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Problem Solving Court Cases	683
Protection Orders	32
Civil	219
Class I Felony	367
Other Criminal	149
Domestic Relations	97
Appeals	343
Administrative Appeals	540
County Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Protection Orders	32
Felony	26
Misdemeanor	23
District Court: Adult Problem-Solving Court	683
Traffic	1
Civil	8
Probate	61
Guardianship/Conservatorship	133
Small Claims	30
Adoption	92
Domestic Relations	97
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Juvenile: Delinquency	100
Juvenile: Status Offender 3B	37
Juvenile: Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Juvenile: Bridge to Independence (B21)	58
Juvenile: Interstate Compact Hearings/Filings	2
Juvenile: Problem-Solving Court Cases	654
Separate Juvenile Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Adoption	49
Domestic Relations	26
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Delinquency	136
Status Offender 3B	54
Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Bridge to Independence B21	36
Interstate Compact Hearing/Filings	2
Problem Solving Court Cases	654



Research and Data

Operations Division

Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation

Chief Standing Bear Justice Administration Building

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District Courts

Weighted Caseload Report



Fiscal Year 2025
July 1, 2024, to
June 30, 2025

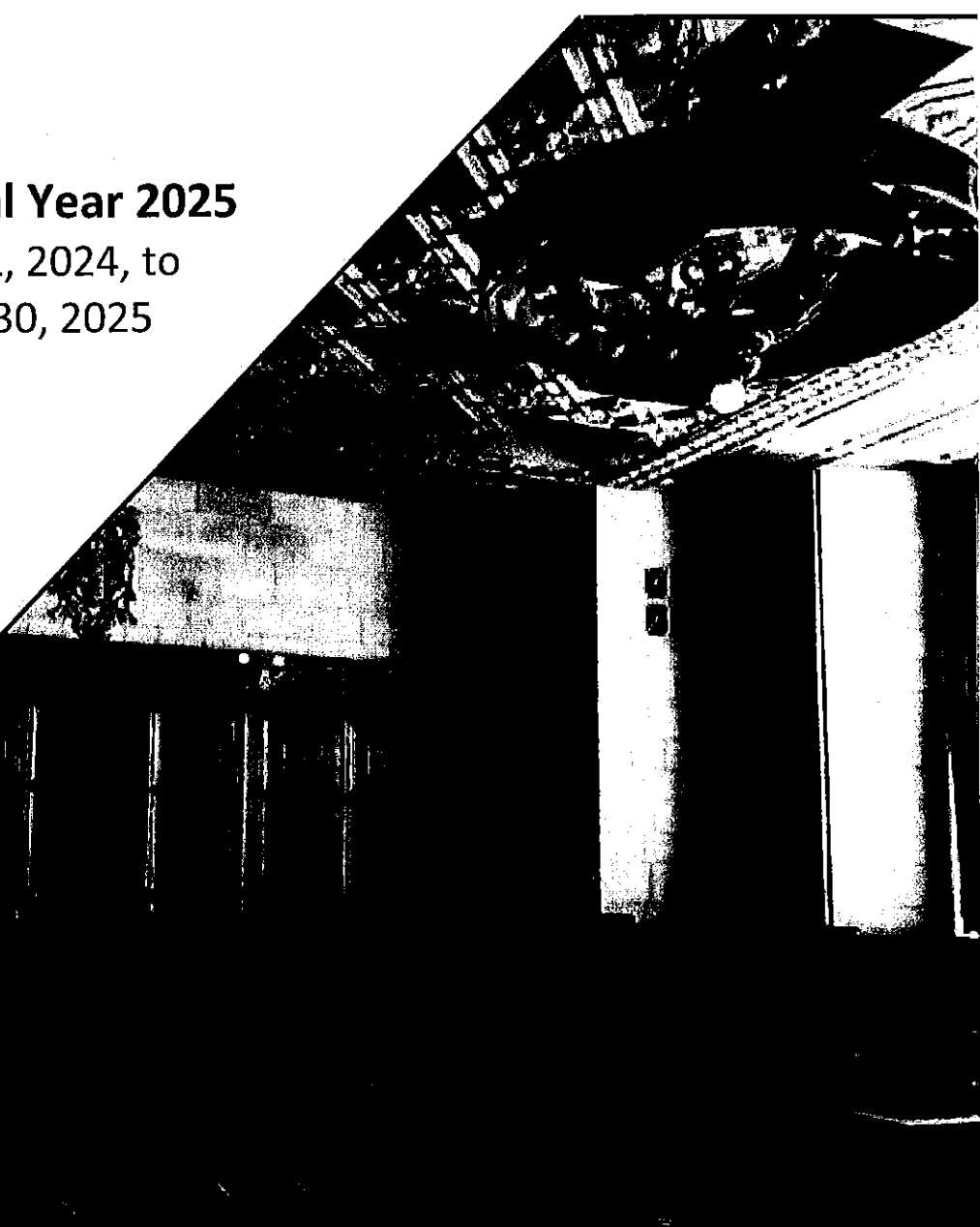


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Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska District Courts Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska has a district court in each of its 93 counties, organized into 12 Judicial Districts. Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-301.02, the Legislature determines the number of district court judges who serve in each judicial district, and the geographic boundaries of each judicial district. An objective assessment of judicial workload allows informed decisions about district boundaries and the number of judges needed to timely resolve the cases in each judicial district.

To assist in evaluating judicial workloads, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-1007(1) requires the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOC) to compile judicial workload statistics based on caseloads weighted by category of case. These weighted caseload statistics are used by the Judicial Branch, the Judicial Resources Commission, and the Legislature to evaluate judicial need, and guide decisions and recommendations on how best to allocate judicial resources across the state.

To ensure the validity, uniformity and accuracy of the AOC's judicial workload statistics, a statewide judicial time study was conducted in 2019-2020 under the direction and leadership of the National Center for State Courts. For a full description of the judicial time study and the recommended weighting methodology and standards, see *Nebraska Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report (October 2020)* (this is noted on tables in this report with an asterisk) on the Nebraska Supreme Court Website. Because this Weighted Caseload Report uses the methodology and standards from the 2020 workload assessment, direct comparison to archived reports is not recommended.

Weighted caseload statistics approximate the number of judges a district needs to handle the current caseload based upon the calculations of a three-year rolling average of case filing data. Therefore, when weighted caseload statistics are examined in conjunction with other compelling and critical metrics, they provide a vital part of an objective and standardized assessment of judicial needs and the fair allocation of judicial resources across juvenile courts in the State of Nebraska.

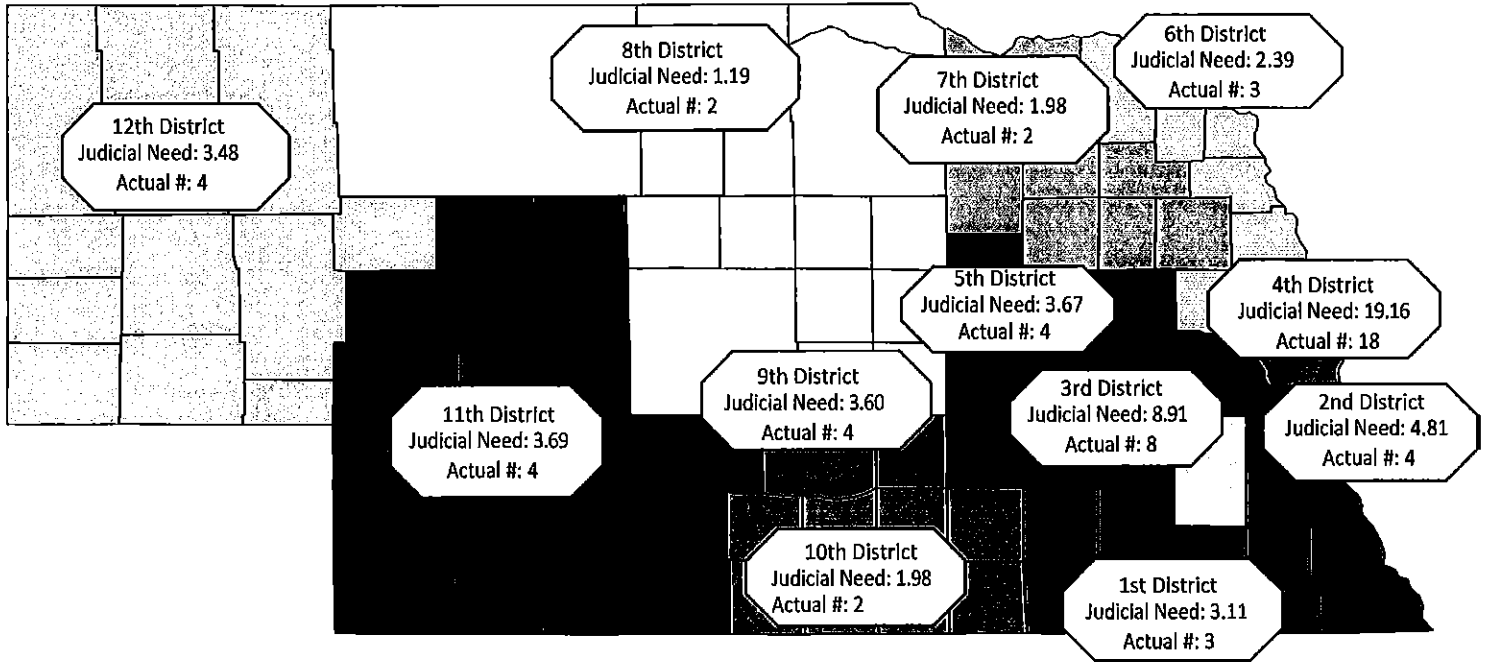


Corey R. Steel
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Nebraska Supreme Court
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www.supremecourt.nebraska.gov

Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska District Court Judicial Needs

Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)



Note: Differences between the total District Court Need for Judges and the sum of individual counties is due to rounding to the nearest one-hundredth.

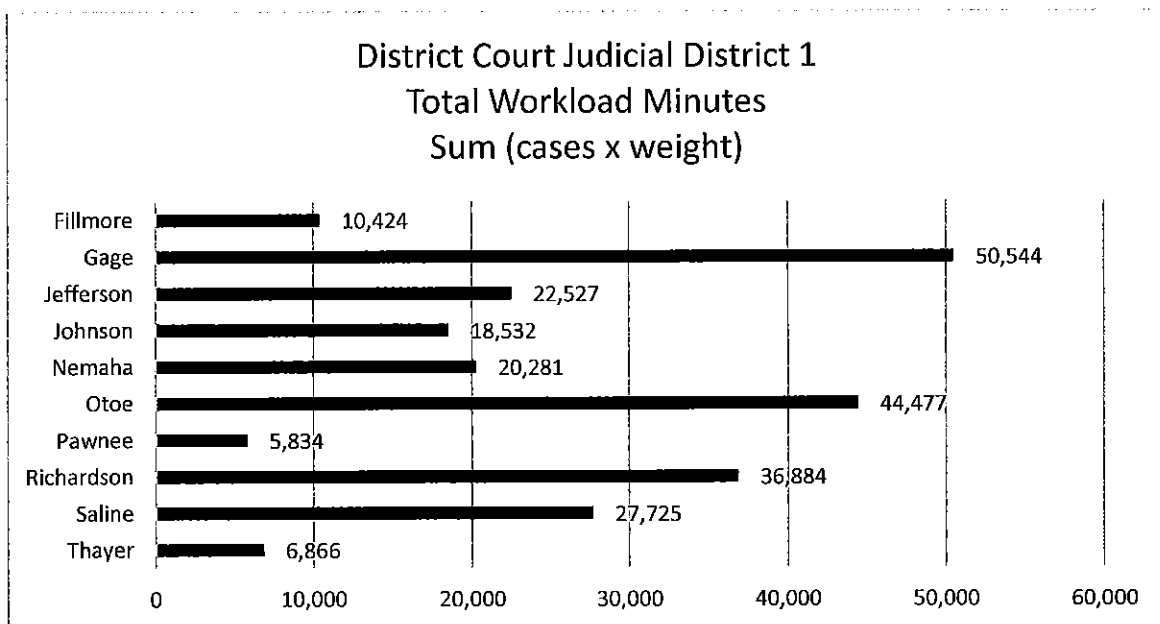
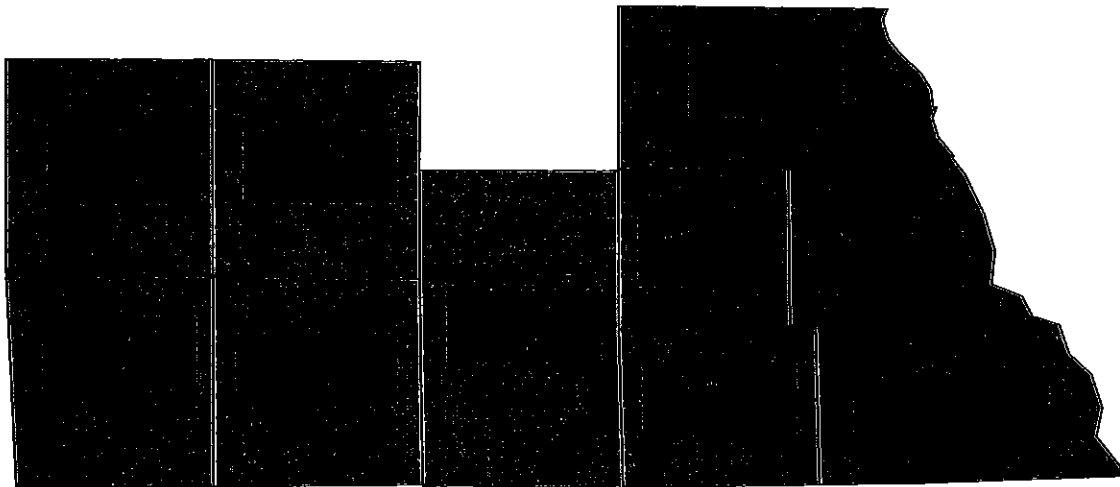
Weighted Caseload Report

1st Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.11
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 1.04
 Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 1st District

Bargen
 Schreiner
 J. Smith

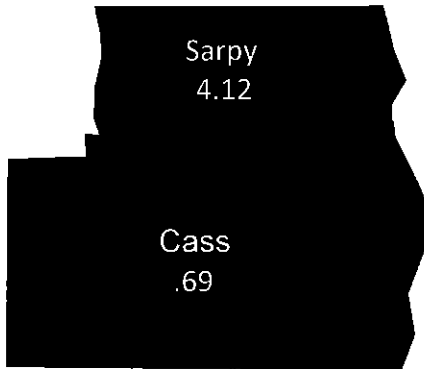


Weighted Caseload Report

2nd Judicial District – District Court

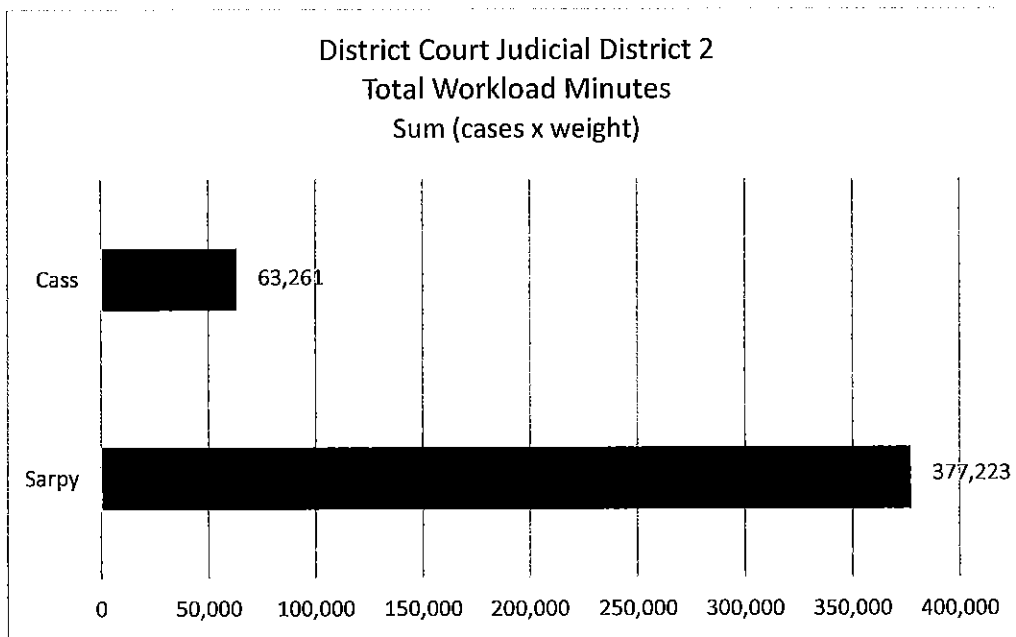
District court need for judges: 4.81
Current number of judges: 4
Workload per judge: 1.20

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 2nd District

Cox
Martinez
M. Smith
Thompson

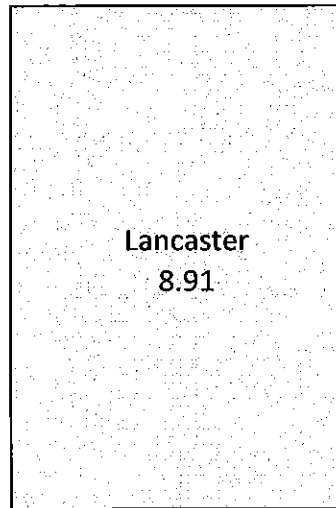


Weighted Caseload Report

3rd Judicial District – District Court

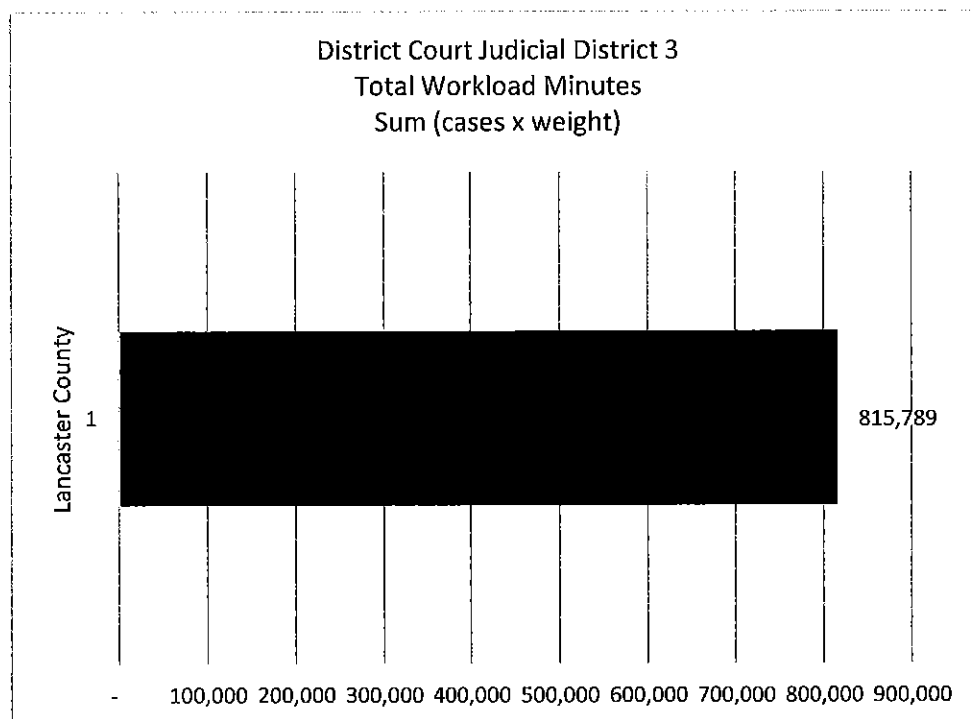
District court need for judges: 8.91
 Current number of judges: 8
 Workload per judge: 1.11

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 3rd District

- Ideus
- Jacobsen
- Maret
- McManaman
- Mellor
- Nelson
- Post
- Strong

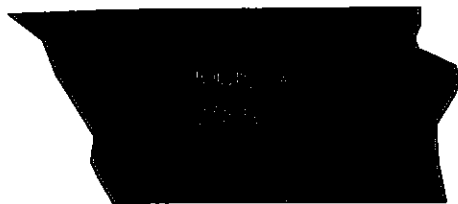


Weighted Caseload Report

4th Judicial District – District Court

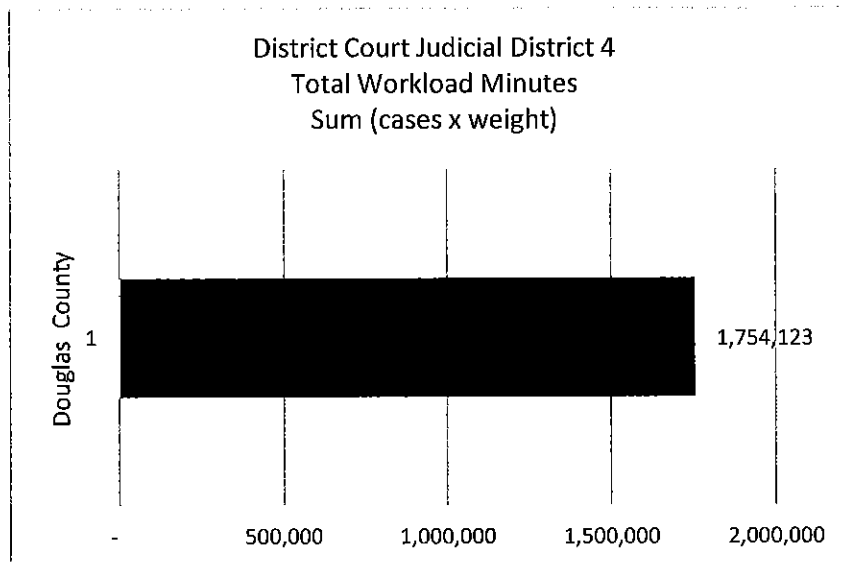
District court need for judges: 19.16
 Current number of judges: 18
 Workload per judge: 1.06

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 4th District

- Alioth**
- Bataillon**
- Benson**
- T. Burns**
- Derr**
- Dougherty**
- Engleman**
- Keane**
- Lindberg (Bowie)**
- Lux**
- Masteller**
- Miller Pankonin**
- Polk**
- Vacant (Retelsdorf)**
- Srb**
- Stratman**
- Vaughn**
- Wheelock**

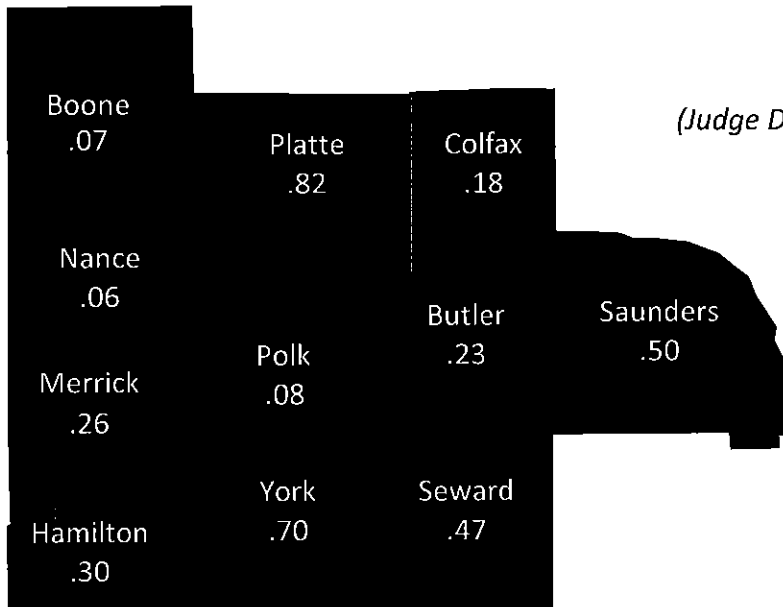


Weighted Caseload Report

5th Judicial District - District Court

District court need for judges: 3.67
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.92

Predicted judicial resources need by county

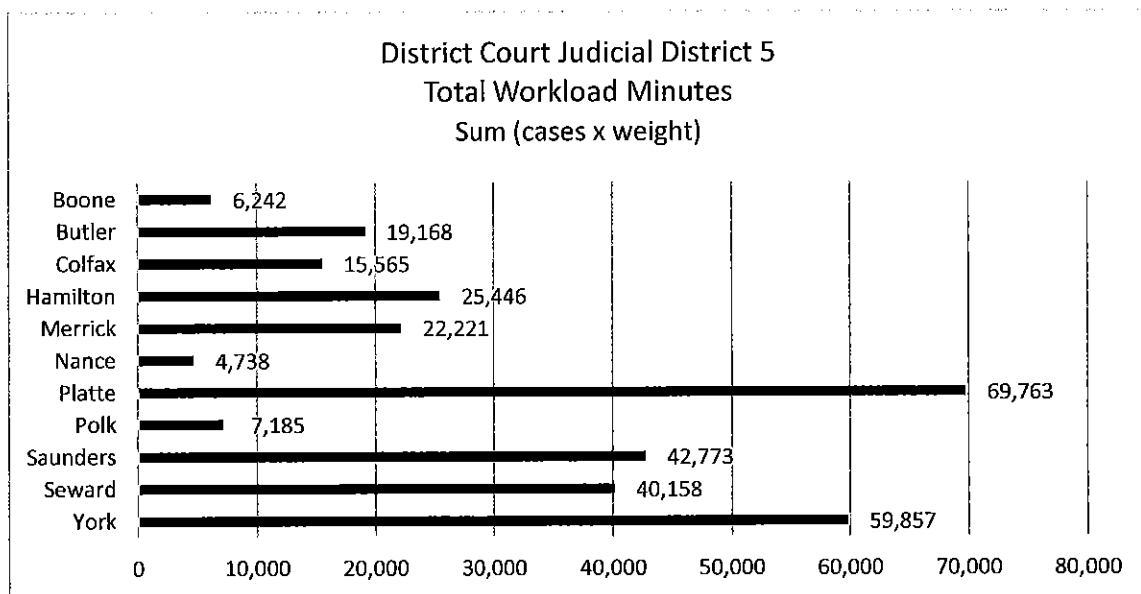


Judges Serving the 5th District

Vacant*

(Judge Doele was sworn in July 17th, 2025 – after caseloads were calculated)

Daugherty
Marroquin
Stecker

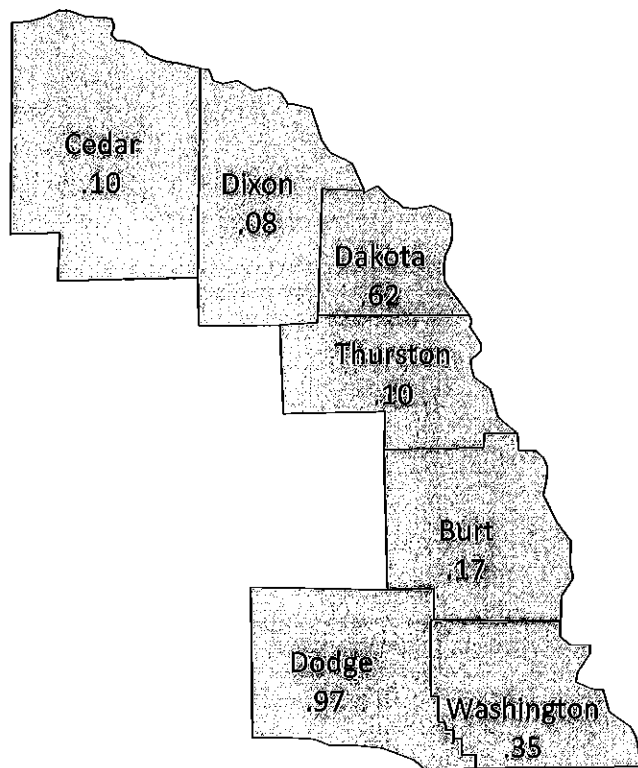


Weighted Caseload Report

6th Judicial District – District Court

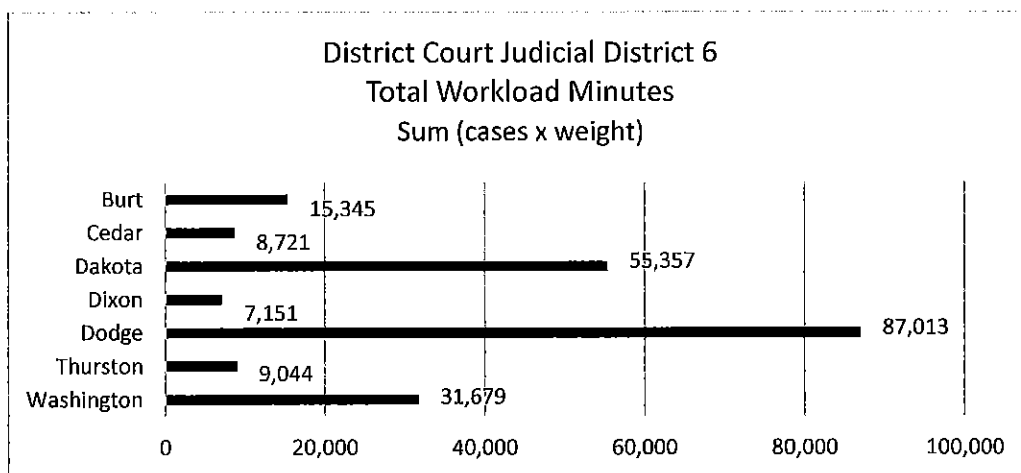
District court need for judges: 2.39
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.80

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 6th District

Hall
 Meismer
 Blackman

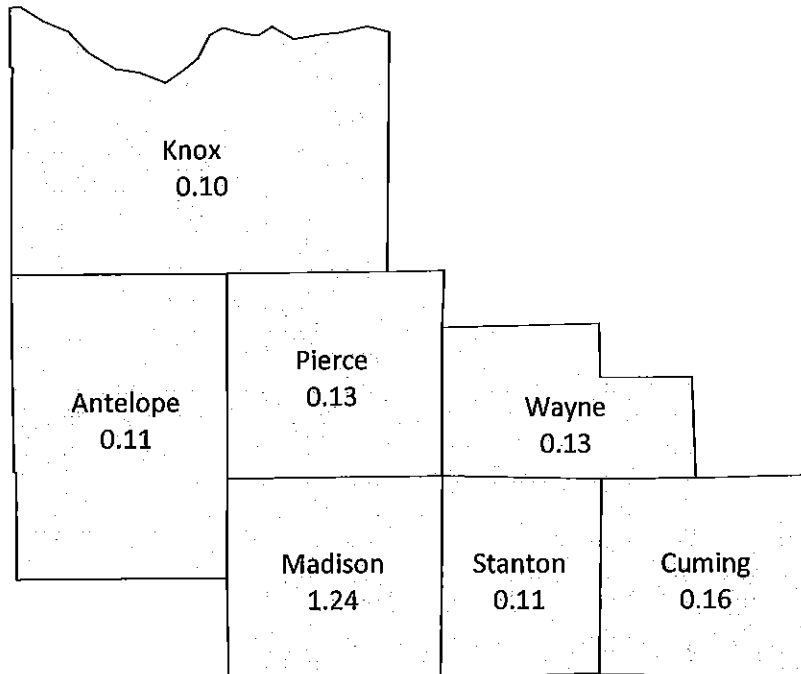


Weighted Caseload Report

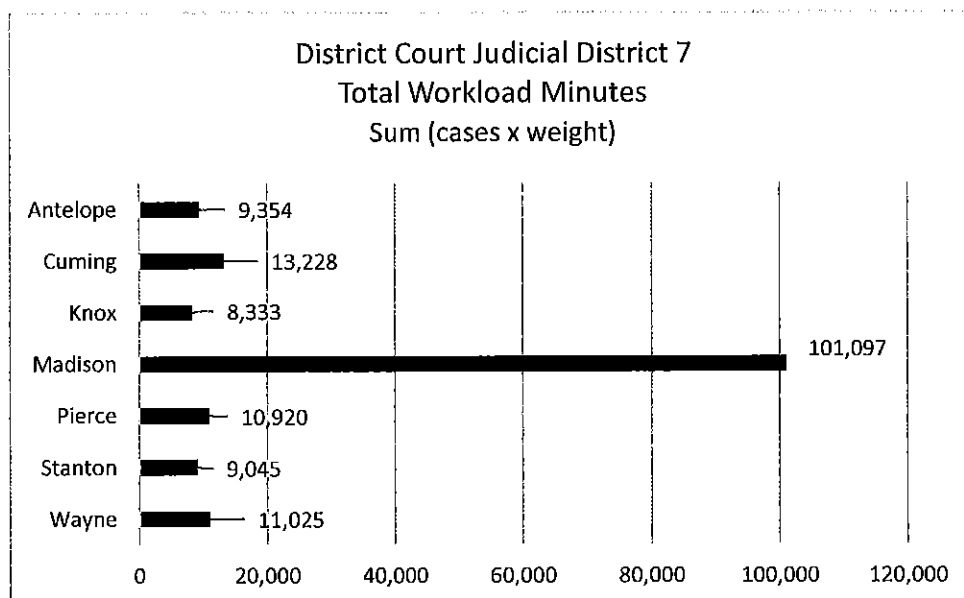
7th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 1.98
 Current number of judges: 2
 Workload per judge: 0.99

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 7th District
 Long (Johnson)
 Kube



Weighted Caseload Report

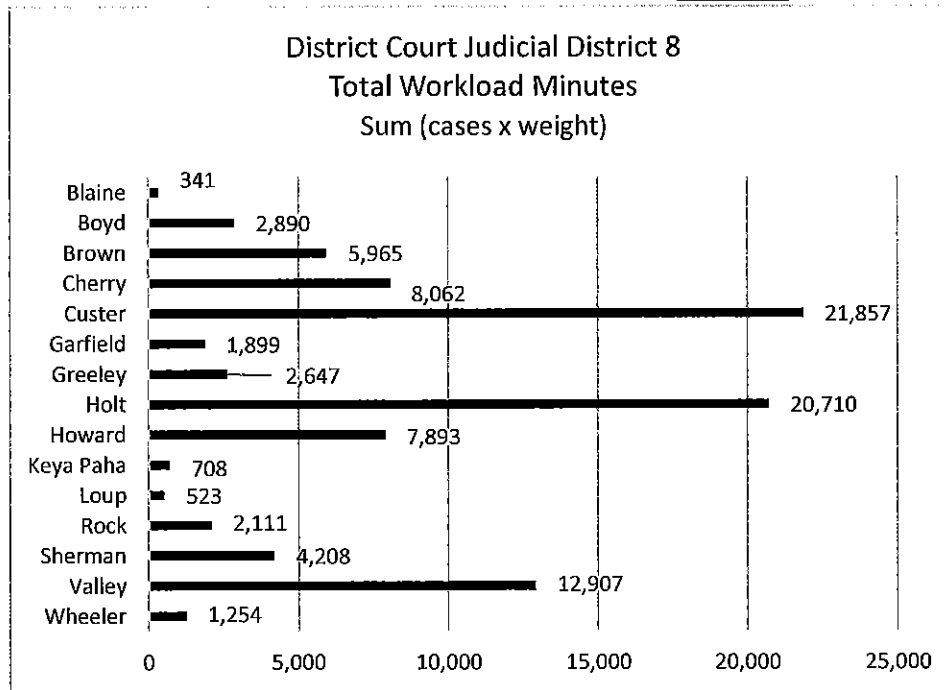
8th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 1.19
 Current number of judges: 2
 Workload per judge: 0.60

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 8th District

Cherry .10	Keya Paha .01		Boyd .04		Kozisek Noakes
	Brown .08	Rock .03	Holt .26		
	Blaine <.01	Loup .01	Garfield .02	Wheeler .02	
	Custer .28		Valley .16	Greeley .03	
			Sherman .05	Howard .10	



Weighted Caseload Report

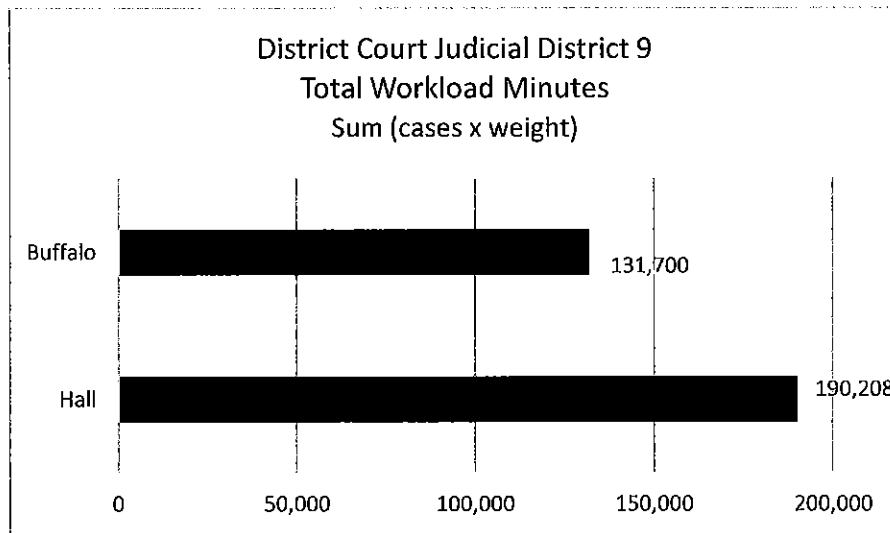
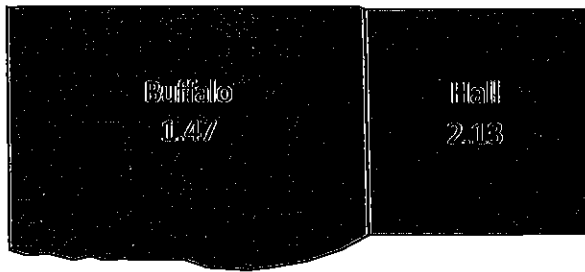
9th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.60
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.90

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 9th District

Butler
Lee
Marsh
Ramsey (Carson)



Weighted Caseload Report

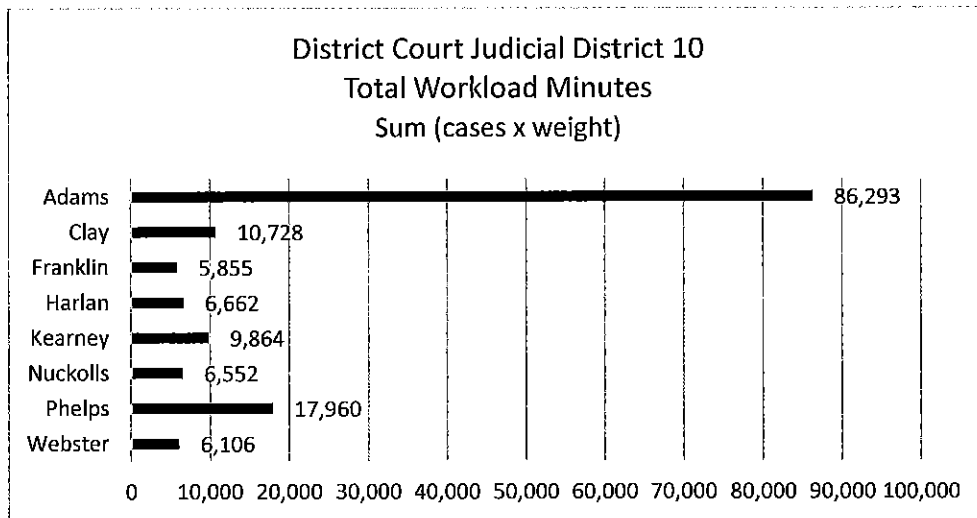
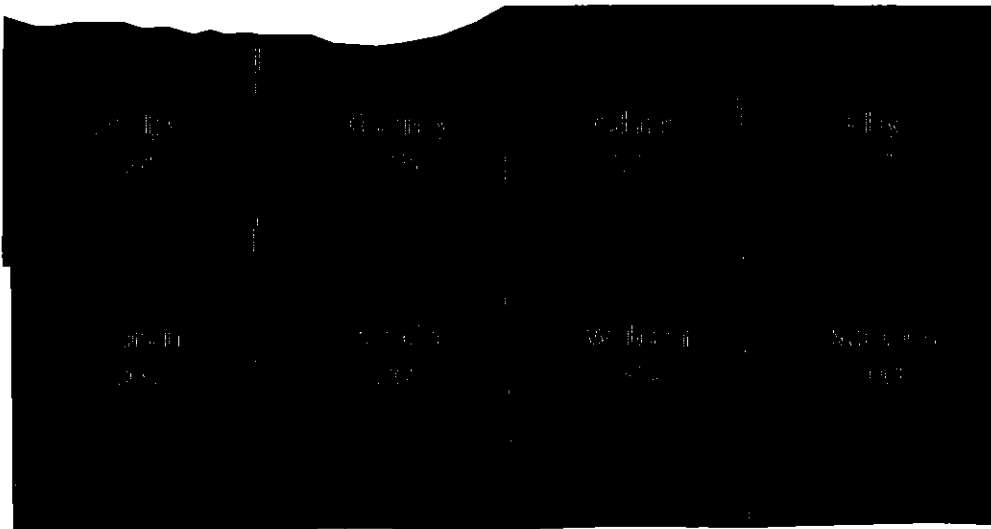
10th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 1.98
 Current number of judges: 2
 Workload per judge: 0.99

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 10th District

Farquhar
 Hoeft



Weighted Caseload Report

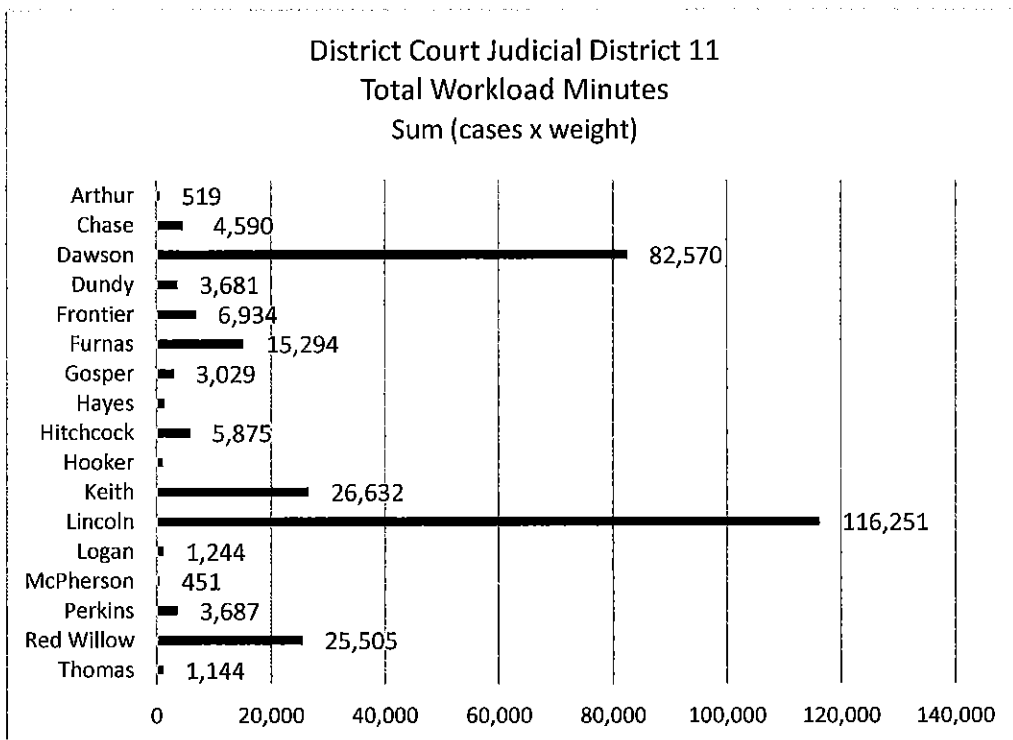
11th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.69
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.92
 Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 11th District

Heng
 Vacant (Neher)
 Piccolo
 Volkmer

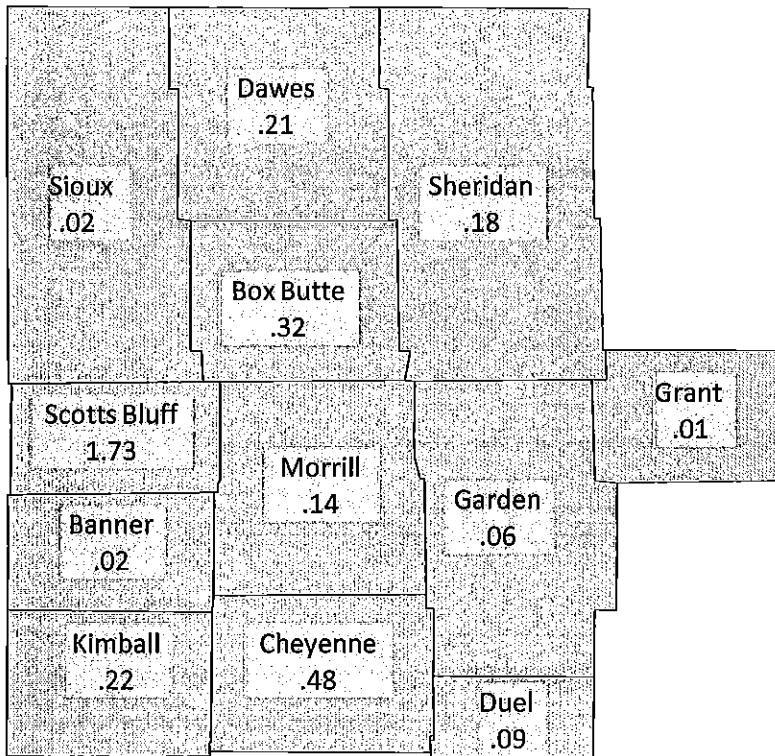


Weighted Caseload Report

12th Judicial District – District Court

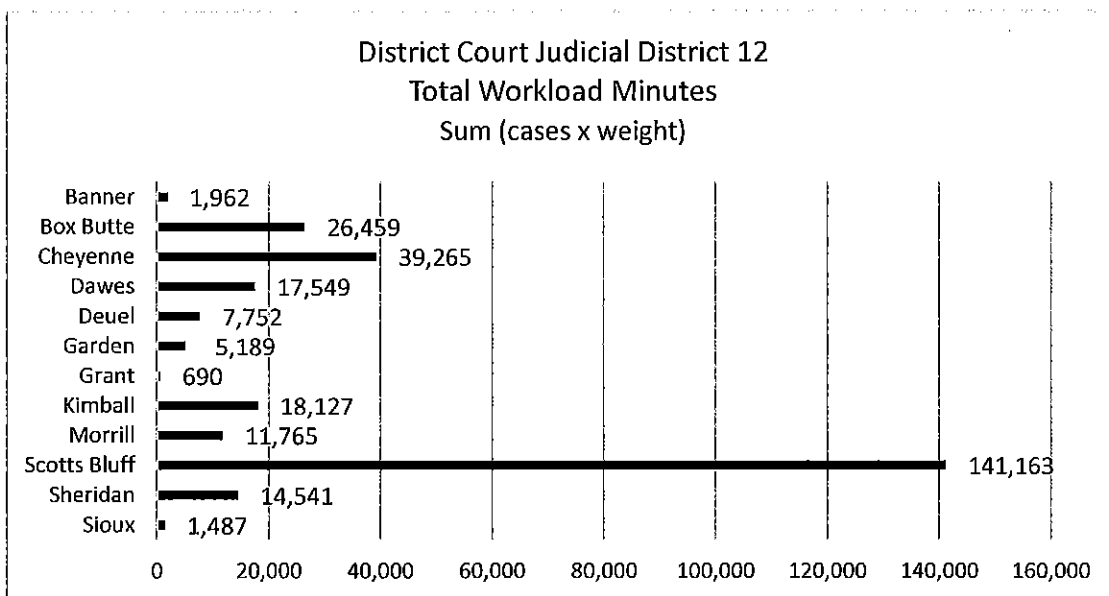
District court need for judges: 3.48
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.87

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 12th District

Dobrovlny
Miller
O’Gorman
Weimer



Weighted Caseload Report

Court Case Type Categories and Weights – Appendix

District Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Problem Solving Court Cases	683
Protection Orders	32
Civil	219
Class I Felony	367
Other Criminal	149
Domestic Relations	97
Appeals	343
Administrative Appeals	540
County Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Protection Orders	32
Felony	26
Misdemeanor	23
District Court: Adult Problem-Solving Court	683
Traffic	1
Civil	8
Probate	61
Guardianship/Conservatorship	133
Small Claims	30
Adoption	92
Domestic Relations	97
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Juvenile: Delinquency	100
Juvenile: Status Offender 3B	37
Juvenile: Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Juvenile: Bridge to Independence (B21)	58
Juvenile: Interstate Compact Hearings/Filings	2
Juvenile: Problem-Solving Court Cases	654
Separate Juvenile Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Adoption	49
Domestic Relations	26
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Delinquency	136
Status Offender 3B	54
Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Bridge to Independence B21	36
Interstate Compact Hearing/Filings	2
Problem Solving Court Cases	654



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Operations Division

**Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation
Chief Standing Bear Justice Administration Building**

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State of Nebraska
District Court of Nebraska
 Fourth Judicial District

JUDGE LEANNE M. SRB
 HALL OF JUSTICE
 OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68103-0410
 402-444-6936
 FAX 402-996-6010

AMANDA VODVARKA
 BAILIFF

MARY MOKEVER RPR, CRR
 STENOGRAPHER

November 10, 2025

Judicial Resources Commission
 c/o Kara Nielsen
 State Capital Building
 P.O. Box 98910
 Lincoln, NE 68509
 Kara.nielsen@nejudicial.gov

RE: Request to Declare Judicial Vacancy

Dear Justice John R. Freudenberg and Members of the Commission:

Please accept this letter as written testimony in support of the request of the Judges of the Fourth Judicial District Court that the Judicial Resources Commission determine the existence of a judicial vacancy in the District Court of the Fourth Judicial District. The vacancy is due to Judge Derek R. Vaughn being appointed to the Nebraska Supreme Court effective November 2025. The Judges are requesting that the Judicial Resource Commission add this issue to its Friday, November 21, 2025 annual meeting agenda.

When a Judge is appointed to another bench, other District Judges manage that Judge's cases, in addition to their own cases, until the Judicial Resources Commission declares a vacancy and a Judge is appointed.

Additionally, the 2024 Nebraska Judicial Branch Weighted Caseload Report concluded this District Court has a need for **18.96 judges**. The 2024 Annual Fiscal Year Caseload Report for the Fourth Judicial District Court reflects the existence of over 12,300 cases filed for the 2024 fiscal year. These numbers reflect the trend this judicial district is experiencing in attaining pre-COVID level case filings. By category for fiscal year, 2024 are as follows:

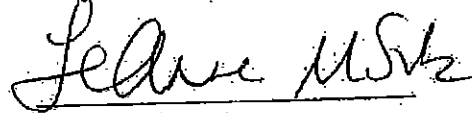
Criminal Felony Class 1:	491
Criminal Other:	8,355
Problem Solving Court:	185
Domestic Relations:	8,760
Protection Orders:	2,344
Civil:	2,094
Appellate Action:	61
Administrative Appeals:	14
TOTAL CASES:	12,304

Accordingly, the Judges of the Fourth Judicial District Court respectfully request that the Judicial Resources Commission declare that a judicial vacancy exists in the District Court of the Fourth Judicial District due to the appointment of Judge Derek R Vaughn to the Nebraska Supreme Court.

Please accept this letter as submitted testimony from the District Court of the Fourth Judicial District in support of declaring a vacancy.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Very Sincerely Yours,



LeAnne M. Srb
Presiding Judge
Fourth Judicial District

CC: Judge Peter C. Bataillon
Judge J. Russell Derr
Judge Marlon A. Polk
Judge Timothy P. Burns
Judge Duane C. Dougherty
Judge Kimberly Miller Pankonin
Judge Shelly R. Stratman
Judge Horacio J. Wheelock
Judge James M. Mastellar
Judge Tressa M. Alioth
Judge T. Olon Engleman
Judge Jeffrey J. Lux
Judge Molly B. Keane
Judge Katie L. Benson
Judge Ryan M. Lindberg
Sheri Larsen, Douglas County District Court Administrator

**HALL COUNTY COURT, DISTRICT NINE
HALL COUNTY COURTHOUSE
111 W 1ST STREET, STE. #1
GRAND ISLAND, NE 68801-6016**

Phone: (308) 385-5135 TDD: (800) 833-7352 Fax: (308) 385-5138

JUDGES

**ALFRED E. COREY, III.
BRYAN S. MCQUAY
GERALD R. JORGENSEN
JOHN P. RADEMACHER**

CLERK MAGISTRATE

STEPHANIE SMITH

January 30, 2026

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Nebraska Supreme Court
Nebraska State Capitol
P.O. Box 98910
Room 2210
Lincoln, NE 68509
Email: ashley.jenkins@nejudicial.gov

Dear Supreme Court Justice Freudenberg and Members of the Commission,

On behalf of the County Court Judges in the Ninth Judicial District, we are asking that you declare a vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Arthur Wetzel. Judge Wetzel will be missed on the bench in Grand Island but we wish him the best in his retirement. Since Judge Wetzel retired, we reached out to neighboring judges to assist us with his caseload. Currently, we have judges coming three days a week to Grand Island on average to assist us with his cases and are very grateful for this support. We recognized early on that trying to find coverage for all five days would be very difficult. As a result, both Judge McQuay and I have taken on additional responsibilities to make sure that participants in the legal system are receiving their day in court on a timely basis. Currently, the Ninth District has four county court judges – two in Hall County (Judge Corey and Judge McQuay) and two in Buffalo County (Judge Jorgensen and Judge Rademacher). In 2023, the Nebraska Legislature created a fifth county court judge for the Ninth District.

To provide a comparative analysis of the caseload in the Ninth District and specifically in Hall County, it would be informative to review data from 2020 to 2025. Based on the annual reports published by the State of Nebraska Administrative Offices of the Courts since 2020, the reported numbers for annual caseload reports and weighted caseload reports are listed below for the Ninth Judicial District and for Hall County:

Exhibit 11

County Court Annual Caseload Report (Fiscal Year)
Ninth Judicial District/Hall County

<u>Cases Filed</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Hall</u>	<u>Juvenile</u>	<u>Hall</u>
2020	19,040	11,544	925	641
2021	18,238	10,662	734	518
2022	17,326	10,514	807	606
2023	17,139	10,693	705	530
2024	19,533	12,356	638	395
2025	21,659	13,683	627	397

County Court Weighted Caseload Report
Ninth Judicial District/Hall County

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Current Need for Judges</u>	<u>Workload Per Judge</u>	<u>Hall</u>
2020	4.46	1.12	2.71
2021	4.50	1.12	2.73
2022	4.43	1.11	2.72
2023	4.11	1.03	2.57
2024	4.09	0.82	2.54
2025	4.07	0.81	2.50

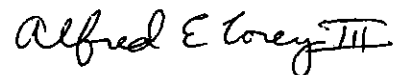
Reviewing the most recent annual caseload reports, adult case numbers in the Ninth District are rising and are more than 2,600 in the fiscal year 2025 compared to the fiscal year 2020. Of that total of 21,659 for the fiscal year 2025, Hall County has over 13,600 of those cases. While juvenile cases numbers have decreased, Hall County still accounts for over 63% of the cases filed in the Ninth District in the fiscal year 2025. In just reviewing the annual caseload reports from 2024 and 2025, the following categories increased in Hall County: misdemeanors, traffic, civil and small claims with protection orders remaining the same number. Hall County has needed between 2.50 and 2.73 judges over the past five years. Regarding the most recent weighted caseload report, the Ninth District has a need for 4.07 judges with a workload of 0.81 per judge. Hall County has a need for 2.50 judges.

As of the 2020 United States Census, Hall County, Nebraska had a population of 62,895. Currently, Hall County has the largest high school in the State of Nebraska with Grand Island Senior High. In a recent news segment on NTV from October 29, 2025, the Grand Island Public Schools said their data showed Grand Island could grow 20,000 people within the next twenty-five years. Grand Island Public Schools is looking at buying land in southwest Grand Island for a new elementary school as well as will have to consider if another high school needs to be built. The Grand Island Independent stated in a recent article on November 1, 2025 that Grand Island's population could grow between 7,000 people and 20,000 people over the same period. The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research states that Hall County's population by 2050 is projected to be almost 71,000 people. While these figures are different,

they all show that Hall County's population is projected to grow. In evaluating our district in 2023, the Ninth District Judicial Resources Work Group stated that Grand Island and Kearney were the fourth and fifth largest cities in Nebraska. The work group suggested that population trends showed both counties increasing with a significant population having interpreter needs. In reviewing the exhibits provided at the last Judicial Resources Commission meeting from November 2025, exhibit 7 stated that Hall County's caseload increased 26% from 2021 to 2025 while Buffalo County's cases increased in the same period by 5%. Hall County's increase is greater than the statewide increase. Overall, our caseloads continue to increase and evidence suggests that Hall County's population will continue to grow over the next twenty-five years. Additional factors that should be considered in filling this position include significant increases in self-represented litigants and the need for language interpretation.

We respectfully request that the Judicial Resources Commission declare that a county court judicial vacancy exists in the Ninth District due to the retirement of Judge Wetzel, with the primary office located in Grand Island, Hall County, Nebraska. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me. Judge Bryan McQuay will be present at the hearing on February 13, 2026 to answer any questions from the Commission. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Alfred E. Corey III
Hall County Court Judge

Nebraska State Bar Association

"Helping lawyers help people"



February 9, 2026

Hon. John R. Freudenberg
Nebraska Supreme Court
State Capitol, #2210
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Justice Freudenberg:

On behalf of the NSBA Judicial Resources Committee ("the Committee"), I wish to convey to the members of the Judicial Resources Commission our recommendation regarding the vacancies being taken up by the Judicial Resources Commission at their February 13, 2026, hearing.

After reviewing the Judicial Weighted Caseload Reports ("Judicial Workload Assessment") for FY 2025, the Committee concluded that the State's justice system will not have adequate judicial resources available unless the current vacancies are filled expeditiously. Therefore, the Committee recommends declaring a vacancy:

1. In the District Court, 3rd District with a primary office location in Lancaster County;
2. In the District Court, 4th District with a primary office location in Douglas County;
3. In the County Court, 7th District with the primary office location outside of Madison County, to be determined in consultation with the successful applicant;
4. In the County Court, 9th District with a primary office location in Hall County; and
5. In the County Court, 12th District with a primary office location in Scotts Bluff County.

Thank you for your consideration of the recommendations set forth herein. Please include this letter with the materials provided to Judicial Resources Commission members before your February 13th hearing.

Sincerely,

Hon. John M. Gerrard
NSBA President

Cc: Corey Steel
Liz Neeley

COUNTY JUDGES

KRISTEN D MICKEY
JAMES M WORDEN

CLERK MAGISTRATE
DIANNE LANA



STATE OF
NEBRASKA
JUDICIAL BRANCH

SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY COURT
TWELFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

February 2, 2026

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Nebraska Supreme Court
P.O. Box 98910
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Judicial Resources Commission Members:

I have had the honor of serving on the county bench in Scotts Bluff County, in the 12th Judicial District for more than 21 years. Over those 21 years I have been a witness to many changes. I handle multiple protection orders every week. A few years ago, local law enforcement decided to use blood tests when investigating driving under the influence. The blood draws often require a warrant signed by a judge in the middle of the night. I have answered that call as many as three times in one week between midnight and 3:00 a.m.

Although our juvenile case load has remained steady, with a few ups and downs, the severity of cases has increased; sexual assault and incest used to be an anomaly. Now, they appear on the docket in Scotts Bluff County with much more frequency.

After I had been on the bench just a few years, my friend Judge Camerer experienced a life changing accident and was never able to return to the bench. For approximately 12 months I was the only judge in Scotts Bluff County. The other judges in the district, and a few from outside the district assisted as they could. However, most days, I was the only judge. I received all the calls for search warrants, I did all the emergency detention hearings and handled the majority of contested cases. I took it as a personal challenge to provide the judicial services the people of Scotts Bluff County deserved. Unfortunately, good intentions don't always carry the day. I found my patience was not what it once was, both at work and with my family. It was a tremendous relief when this commission filled Judge Camerer's position.

Scotts Bluff County is in a unique position geographically as well. There is only one sitting county judge less than an hour's drive and he is approximately 55 minutes. There are a total of 4 county judges within a 2-hour drive of Scotts Bluff County Court. If there is only one Judge in Scott Bluff County and that judge is, for any reason, unable to work for any unusual amount of time, the case load would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to cover. Finally, a county judge is part of the community he or she serves. Over the years I have become

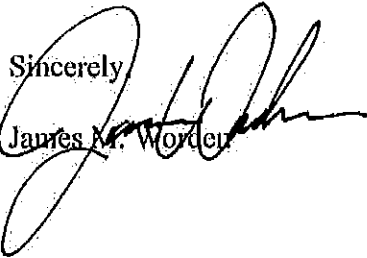
Exhibit 13

SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY COURT
1725 10TH STREET
GERING, NE 69341

1 of 2
60 of 69

familiar with the mental health providers, substance counselors, school administrators, businesses, and churches. Those relationships have helped me in matching people with solutions. It would be hard, if not impossible, for a judge to come here once a week from out of town to develop the same knowledge and relationships.

I'm sure you will have the case numbers at your disposal. It is my hope the information I have provided, when considered with the numbers, will encourage you to find Scotts Bluff County needs 2 county judges.

Sincerely

James M. Worden

STATE OF NEBRASKA
TWELFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
COUNTY COURTS

February 10, 2026

Justice John R. Freudenberg
Nebraska Supreme Court
P.O. Box 98910
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509
Emailed to: ashley.jenkins@nejudicial.gov

Dear Justice Freudenberg and Members of the Commission:

Please accept this letter as written testimony in support of the request of the County Judges of the Twelfth Judicial District to declare that a vacancy exists in the office of the County Court, Twelfth Judicial District, due to the retirement of Judge James Worden.

As you are probably aware, the Twelfth Judicial District includes twelve counties: Sheridan, Dawes, Sioux, Grant, Box Butte, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Banner, Kimball, Cheyenne, Deuel and Garden. The district has for quite some time had five county court judges, two of which were primarily based out of Scotts Bluff County. There was a logical reason for this as a high number of the district's caseload originates in Scotts Bluff County. With Judge Worden's well-deserved retirement comes the specter of covering his large caseload with the remaining four judges in the district. This has been arranged whereby Judge Roland (based in Sidney), Judge Wess (based in Alliance) and I (based in Chadron) have agreed to cover roughly five days per month in Scotts Bluff County. This is in addition to Judge Mickey (based in Gering) covering multiple other dates. Just for some perspective, each of those five travel days for Judge Roland will involve two hours and thirty minutes round trip. That's roughly twelve hours and thirty minutes just on the road per month. And while videoconferencing is a great tool that can be utilized on many occasions, it will be unlikely that such videoconferencing can be utilized for hearings such as those just mentioned. These four to five days per judge per month are normal motion days in Scotts Bluff County Court – not special evidentiary hearing and trial dates. In other words, the hearings on the four to five motion days per month for each judge will entail the entire workday. Videoconferencing will likely be impractical for such hearings.

While Judge Roland will be taking two and a half hours on each of his trips to and from Gering, Judge Wess will be closer to three hours roundtrip to and from Gering. This means that Judge Wess will need to travel roughly fifteen hours per month to help in Scotts Bluff County. Likewise, I will be traveling approximately three hours and forty minutes roundtrip to and from Gering on each individual trip during this interim period. That means that I will spend approximately eighteen hours and twenty minutes of windshield time per month just to preside over court in Scotts Bluff County. I ask you to keep in mind that the above windshield hours merely constitute monthly travel to Scotts Bluff County. They do not include the drive-time each

of us dedicates to monthly travel to our normal counties such as Sioux, Grant, Morrill, Deuel, Kimball, Garden and Banner.

Additionally, the time each of the remaining four judges in our district will be required to devote to both the additional travel mentioned above and courtroom duties approximately five times per month will detract from each of our abilities to be in our offices conducting legal research or writing written decisions that are a requirement of our profession. I believe that none of the remaining four judges in our district have court bailiffs, judicial assistants, legal interns or law clerks that could assist with some of the administrative and judicial tasks that are required outside of the courtroom. Speaking for myself, the drive time, combined with in-court time will leave my schedule only able to accommodate approximately two to three full days per month for the scheduling of any evidentiary hearings or trials over this interim coverage period.

Admittedly, my schedule should still allow for approximately three to four half days per month to set aside for other matters. Nonetheless, it is impractical to believe that these few additional days and half days can be utilized solely for in-court hearings; much of that time will need to be devoted to legal research, writing and preparation for upcoming hearings. Keeping such a schedule is ultimately unworkable and will damage the dispensation of justice for the public.

Finally, I will not bore the commission members with the weighted caseload reports for the relevant years; this information is more than likely already in the record. Nonetheless, I conducted a little research of my own by calculating the raw caseload numbers for the calendar years 2024 and 2025. After comparing the numbers (between Criminal, Traffic, Juvenile, Small Claims, Civil, Probate and Adoption), the raw case count in the Twelfth District climbed from 2024 to 2025. The case count across the district for 2024 was 19,294 while for 2025 it was 19,781, a rise of 487 cases or approximately a 2.5% increase. Obviously, case counts fluctuate over time but combined with the factors mentioned above relating to travel as well as various time constraint pressures which will of necessity be imposed upon the remaining four county court judges in our district, it is self-evident that declaring a vacancy and permitting Judge Worden's seat be filled is the prudent and reasonable thing to do.

Fortunately, this Commission determined that there was still a need for a fifth county court judge in the Twelfth Judicial District in 2022 upon the retirement of Judge Harford. I appreciate this Commission making that determination then and suggest the need for five judges still exists. Based on the Weighted Caseload Report for the fiscal year 2025, the Twelfth Judicial District had a Workload per judge of 0.82 (this was even before the raw numbers I mentioned above). I recall a Nebraska Bar Association article written sometime in 2022 (I believe) suggesting that if the workload per judge in a district was less than a 0.60 (I believe), then in that event a district should not declare a vacancy and the seat should move elsewhere. I also recall that the article mentioned that if the workload per judge was 1.15 or above, an additional judgeship should be created for that district. The Twelfth's numbers (as of the 2025 Weighted Caseload Report) sit somewhere between both extremes.

As part of the meeting set for February 13, 2026, the Commission is also set to consider whether a county court judge should be replaced in the Ninth Judicial District because of the recent retirement of Judge Wetzl. The Ninth Judicial District has a workload per judge factor of 0.81, which is less than the Twelfth. I do not wish to be understood as "advocating" specifically for the

Ninth district but would ask that if the Commission were to fill the Ninth District seat, it would only be fair to likewise fill the Twelfth District seat. Furthermore, when the Nebraska legislature passed a law during the 2023 legislative session creating the fifth county judge in the Ninth Judicial District, they must have done so – in part - based on the County Courts Weighted Caseload Report for the fiscal year 2022 (running from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022) which indicated a need for county court judges at 4.43 and a Workload per judge of 1.11 in the Ninth. At that time of course, the Ninth District only had four judges. But the legislature must also have considered the County Courts Weighted Caseload Report for the *calendar* year 2022 (running from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022) which indicated a need for county court judges at 4.12 and a Workload per judge of 1.03. As stated above, the need for county judges in the Twelfth (4.10) now stands higher than that of the Ninth (4.07). Both seats should be filled.

Finally, I apologize for not appearing in person. It is approximately 392 miles from Rushville to Lincoln, and I'd already scheduled (prior to receipt of notice of Judge Worden's retirement date) an out-of-state travel day. I would ask that this Commission not construe my absence as in any way apathetic about Judge Worden's replacement. For the aforementioned reasons, I respectfully request that you fill the county judge vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Worden. Thank you.

Respectfully yours,


Aaron J. Conn
Presiding Judge
Twelfth County Court Judicial District



Hall County Public Defender

117 E 1st St Ste 2
Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

P 380.385.5016 | F 308.385.5029 | TDD 800.833.7352

VICKY A. KENNEY | JEFF E. LOEFFLER | SIDNEA L. BROWN | ERIC S. KLEVELAND | EDWINA M. HEISE
JESSICA S. FAUSS | JASON J. SANFORD

Dear Members of the Judicial Resources Committee,

I am writing to urge the Committee to find that a continued need exists within the 9th Judicial District to fill the vacancy due to Judge Arthur Wetzel's retirement, and if recommendation is made as to the primary office location, that location be Hall County.

While docket numbers may reflect a temporary decrease in pending cases, that snapshot does not accurately reflect the long-term realities of this district and specifically Hall County. In my over twenty years of experience practicing within this judicial district, it has been the norm—rather than the exception—for our County Court Judges to carry substantial and often overwhelming caseloads. In fact, there have been multiple instances in the past where Hall County was required to rely on judges from other districts and Buffalo County to assist with docket management due to volume and scheduling demands.

Based on this historical pattern, I believe the present reduction in numbers is temporary and that case filings will return to what has long been considered "normal" levels for this district. Until any decrease in cases is sustained consistently over several years, it is premature to conclude that the need for this judgeship no longer exists. Maintaining adequate judicial resources is critical to ensuring timely access to justice, efficient case resolution, and fairness for litigants.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee find that with the retirement of Judge Arthur Wetzel, there is a judicial vacancy in the 9th Judicial District and the primary office location for this vacancy should be Hall County. Thank you for your time, careful consideration, and continued service to our judicial system.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vicky A. Kenney".

Vicky A. Kenney
Hall County Public Defender

SHANAHAN LAW FIRM, L.L.C.

Dear members of the Judicial Resources Committee,

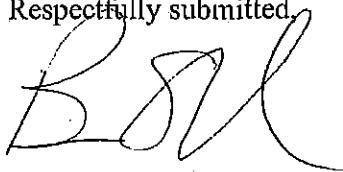
I am writing in regards to the 9th Judicial District vacancy due to Judge Arthur Wetzel's retirement. I am urging you to find that due to the retirement of Judge Wetzel, there is a judicial vacancy that needs to be filled with the primary office location in Hall County, Nebraska.

I have practiced law in Hall County for 7 years, primarily from the position of Hall County Deputy Attorney. It is the norm for our County Court docket to be filled with overwhelming caseloads, so much so that judges from Buffalo County would travel to Hall County to assist with docket management.

As President of the local Hall County Bar Association, I have spoken with multiple attorneys regarding Judge Wetzel's vacancy, and there is a strong consensus that this position should be filled as soon as possible. Leaving this vacancy unfilled risks unnecessary delays, inefficiencies, and strain on the court system of Hall County.

For these reasons, and on behalf of the Hall County Bar Association, I respectfully request that the Judicial Resources Committee take prompt action to fill this vacancy to ensure the continued fair and efficient administration of justice in Hall County.

Respectfully submitted,



Benjamin W. Shanahan
President of Hall County Bar Association



Hall County Attorney

MARTY KLEIN

231 S. Locust PO Box 367

Grand Island NE 68802-0367

Telephone (308) 385-5150

Fax (308) 385-5111

Child Support (308) 385-5160

February 12, 2026

Judicial Resources Commission
c/o Nebraska Supreme Court
P.O. Box 98910
Lincoln, NE 68509

Re: Need for a County Court Judgeship in the Ninth Judicial District – Hall County

Members of the Commission:

I write in support of a determination that a judicial vacancy exists within the Ninth Judicial District and that the position should be filled in **Hall County**.

Hall County is one of the most active and demanding county court jurisdictions in Nebraska. The volume of filings alone places extraordinary pressure on the court, its staff, prosecutors, defense counsel, and law enforcement. Beyond the raw numbers, the *nature* of the caseload further distinguishes Hall County from many other jurisdictions in the state.

According to the Nebraska Judicial Branch's *FY 2025 County Court Annual Caseload Report*, Hall County's county court handled **approximately 13,683 total adult case filings** between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025, making it one of the heaviest county court dockets in the state outside of the largest urban counties.

In addition, Hall County bears a large juvenile docket. Again, according to the Nebraska Judicial Branch's *FY 2025 County Court Annual Caseload Report*, Hall County's county court handled **approximately 459 total juvenile case filings** between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025, making it one of the heaviest county court dockets in the state outside of the largest urban counties.

A comparison of the 3rd largest (Sarpy County – 213,530 residents), 4th largest (Hall County – 63,291 residents) and 5th largest (Buffalo County – 52,076 residents) counties in Nebraska illustrates that while Hall County's caseload is substantial and well above peer counties and warrants additional judicial resources.

Exhibit 17

County / Court	Adult County Court Filings (Misd., Traffic, Civil, etc.)	Total Juvenile Filings	Juvenile Abuse/Neglect (3(a)) Filings
Hall County	13,683 – adult county court filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)	397 – county court juvenile filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)	62 – juvenile 3(a) filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)
Buffalo County	7,976 – adult county court filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)	230 – county court juvenile filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)	64 – juvenile 3(a) filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)
Sarpy County	22,952 – adult county court filings (Nebraska Judicial Branch)	~786 – separate juvenile court total (based on Sarpy Separate Juvenile Court FY 2024) (supremecourt.nebraska.gov)	~152 – separate juvenile 3(a) children (total for Sarpy Separate Juvenile Court in FY 2024) (supremecourt.nebraska.gov)

Abuse/neglect cases, status offenses, and juvenile delinquency matters require prompt hearings, intensive judicial oversight, and continuing review. These cases are time-sensitive and emotionally charged, often involving detention decisions, placement issues, and coordination with multiple agencies. The existing judicial resources are stretched thin in attempting to provide the level of supervision and timeliness these families and children deserve.

The county court must also manage substantial civil, small claims, probate, guardianship/conservatorship, and traffic caseloads. Each of these areas carries statutory timelines and public expectations for prompt access to the court. When judicial capacity is limited, scheduling delays inevitably follow, affecting litigants, victims, and attorneys alike.

Grand Island's role as a regional hub compounds the workload. With major transportation corridors, a large workforce, and a growing and diverse population, Hall County experiences a steady inflow of cases that might otherwise be distributed across smaller communities. Law enforcement activity reflects this reality, and the court's docket mirrors it.

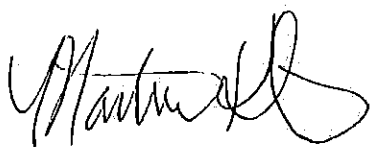
The demand for judicial services in Hall County consistently exceeds the capacity that can reasonably be absorbed without another judge. Additional judicial resources would:

- improve timely access to hearings and trials,
- reduce backlogs and continuances,
- allow more meaningful attention to juvenile and problem-solving matters,
- enhance consistency in pretrial supervision and compliance, and
- promote overall efficiency for all justice system partners.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to find that a vacancy exists and to authorize that the open county court judgeship be filled in Hall County. Doing so will materially improve the administration of justice for the citizens of the Ninth Judicial District.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marty Klein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marty" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Klein".

MARTY KLEIN
HALL COUNTY ATTORNEY
martink@hallcountyne.gov

(308) 385-5150

County Courts

Weighted Caseload Report



Fiscal Year 2025

July 1, 2024, to
June 30, 2025

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Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska County Courts Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska has a district court in each of its 93 counties, organized into 12 Judicial Districts. Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-301.02, the Legislature determines the number of district court judges who serve in each judicial district, and the geographic boundaries of each judicial district. An objective assessment of judicial workload allows informed decisions about district boundaries and the number of judges needed to timely resolve the cases in each judicial district.

To assist in evaluating judicial workloads, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-1007(1) requires the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOC) to compile judicial workload statistics based on caseloads weighted by category of case. These weighted caseload statistics are used by the Judicial Branch, the Judicial Resources Commission, and the Legislature to evaluate judicial need, and guide decisions and recommendations on how best to allocate judicial resources across the state.

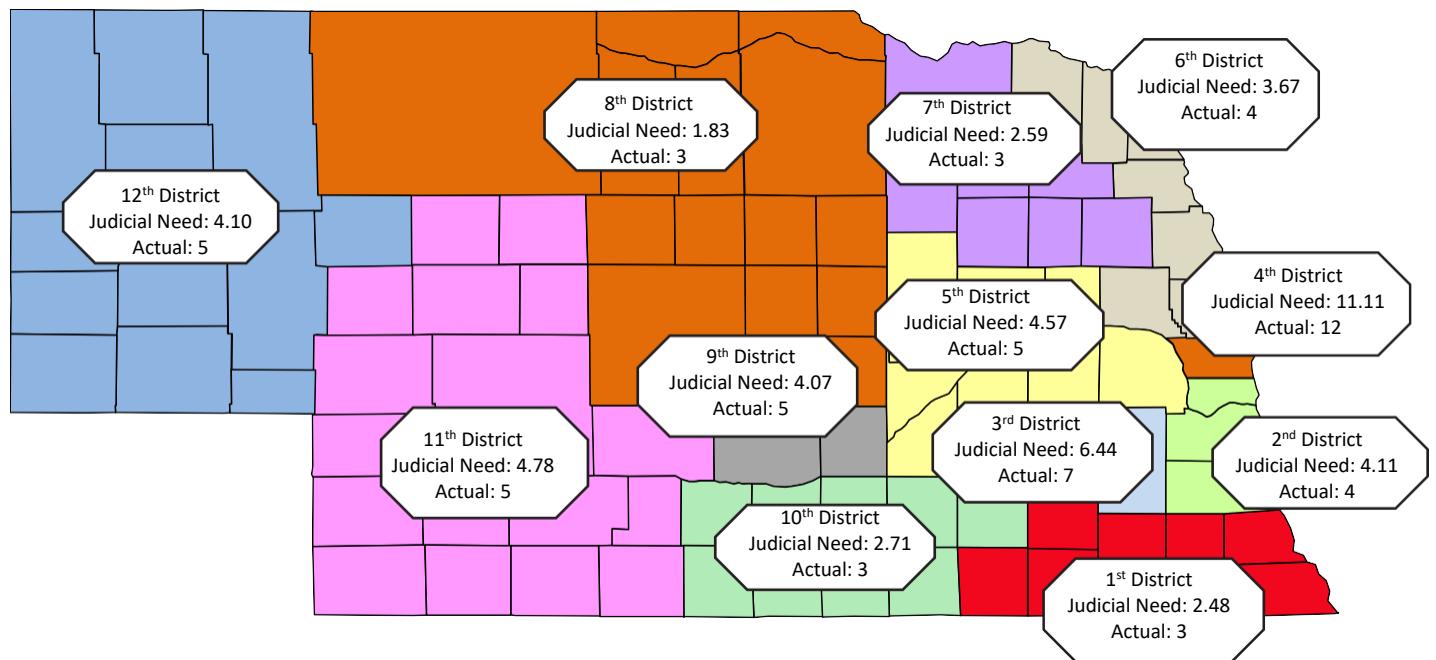
To ensure the validity, uniformity and accuracy of the AOC's judicial workload statistics, a statewide judicial time study was conducted in 2019-2020 under the direction and leadership of the National Center for State Courts. For a full description of the judicial time study and the recommended weighting methodology and standards, see *Nebraska Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report* (October 2020) (this is noted on tables in this report with an asterisk) on the Nebraska Supreme Court Website. Because this Weighted Caseload Report uses the methodology and standards from the 2020 workload assessment, direct comparison to archived reports is not recommended.

Weighted caseload statistics approximate the number of judges a district needs to handle the current caseload based upon the calculations of a three-year rolling average of case filing data. Therefore, when weighted caseload statistics are examined in conjunction with other compelling and critical metrics, they provide a vital part of an objective and standardized assessment of judicial needs and the fair allocation of judicial resources across juvenile courts in the State of Nebraska.



Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska County Court Judicial Needs Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)



Note: Differences between the total District Court Need for Judges and the sum of individual counties is due to rounding to the nearest one-hundredth.

Weighted Caseload Report

1st Judicial District – County Court

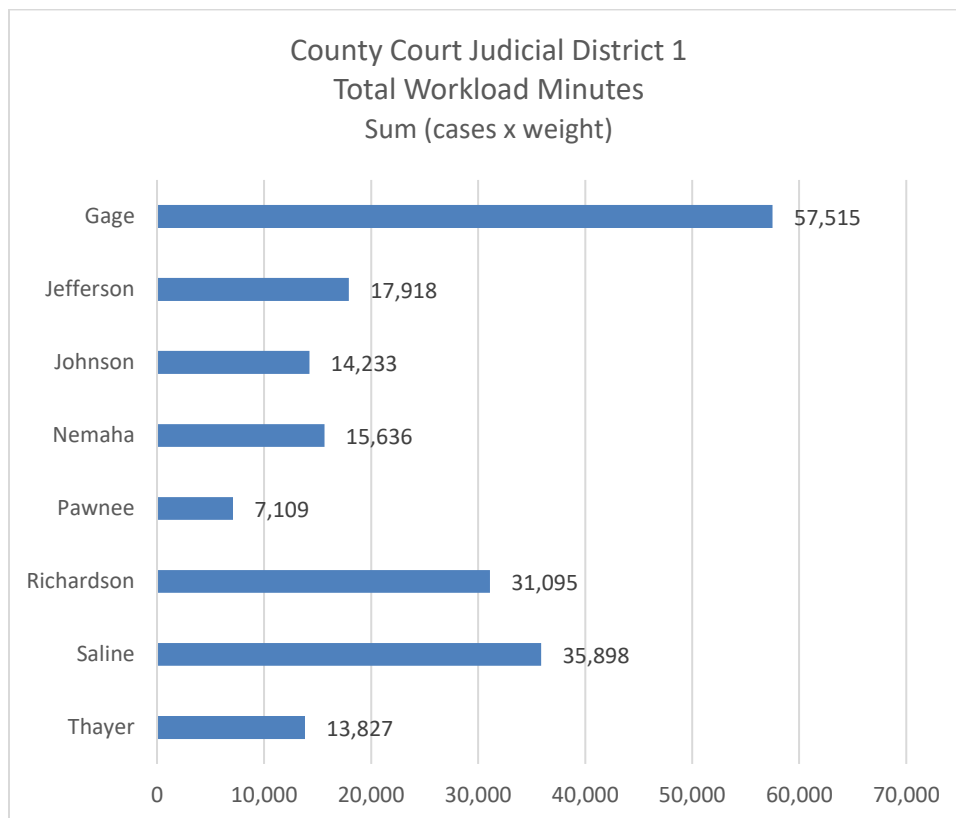
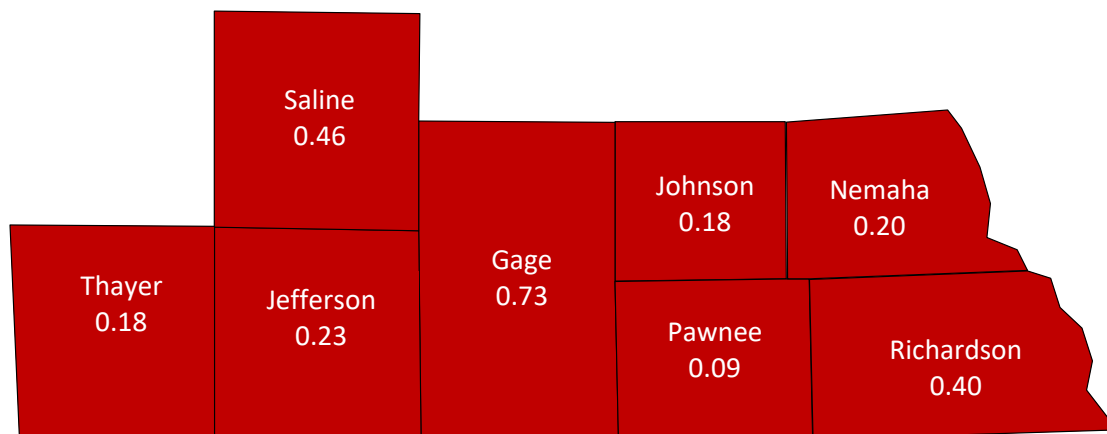
County court need for judges: 2.48
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.83

NOTE: An additional **0.01** is given due to Judge R. Smith being assigned to Problem-Solving Court cases in Fillmore County (District Court) and Otoe County (District Court).

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 1st District

L. Bauer
 Gaertig
 R. Smith

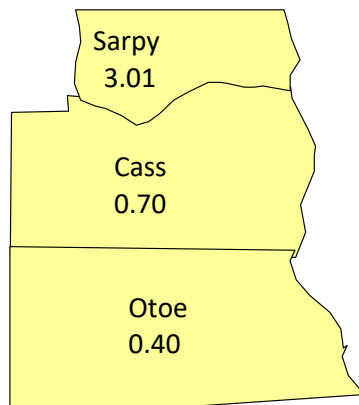


Weighted Caseload Report

2nd Judicial District – County Court

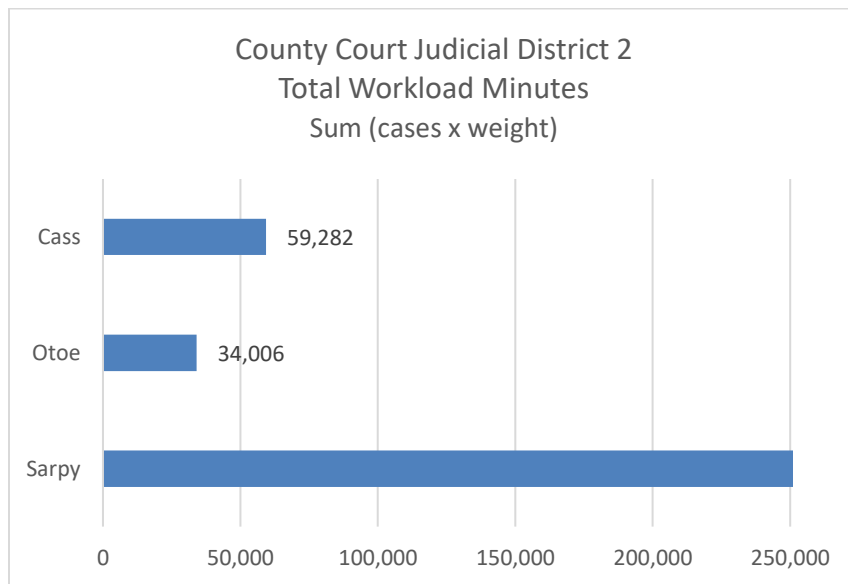
County court need for judges: 4.11
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 1.03

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 2nd District

Freeman
Hutton
Palm
Partsch



Weighted Caseload Report

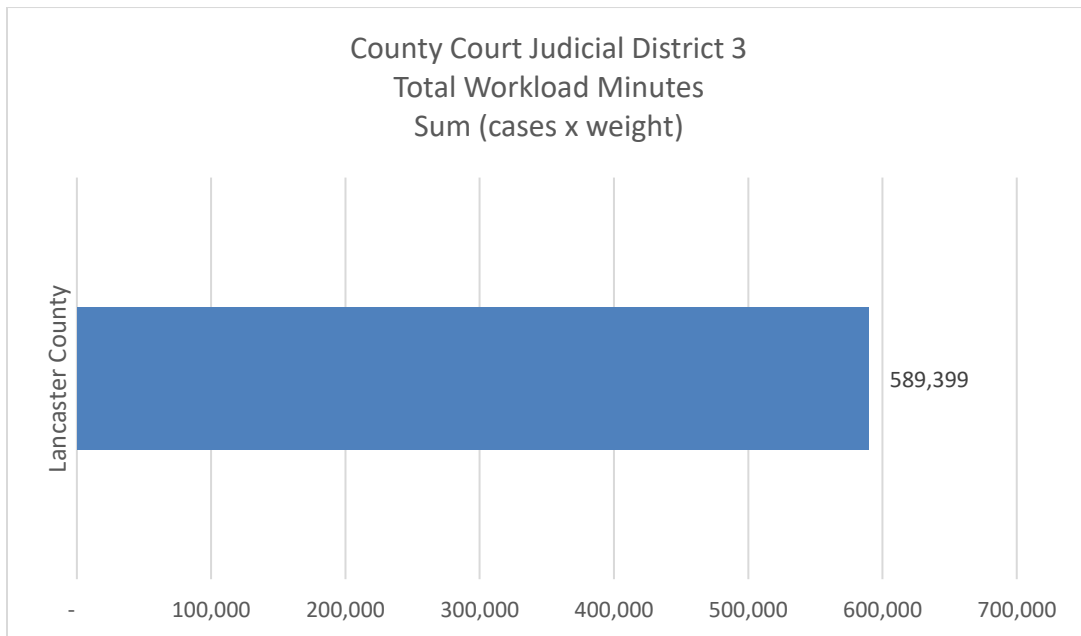
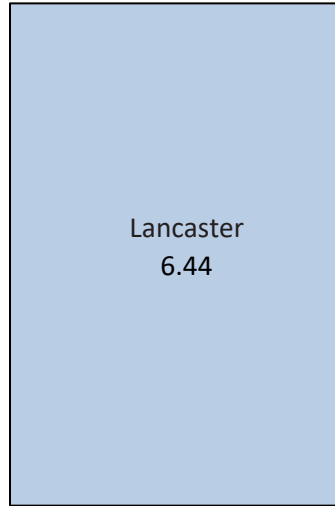
3rd Judicial District –County Court

County court need for judges: 6.44
 Current number of judges: 7
 Workload per judge: 0.92

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 3rd District

- Acton**
- Dalton**
- Parsley**
- Phillips**
- Reuter**
- Yardley**
- Zimmerman**



Weighted Caseload Report

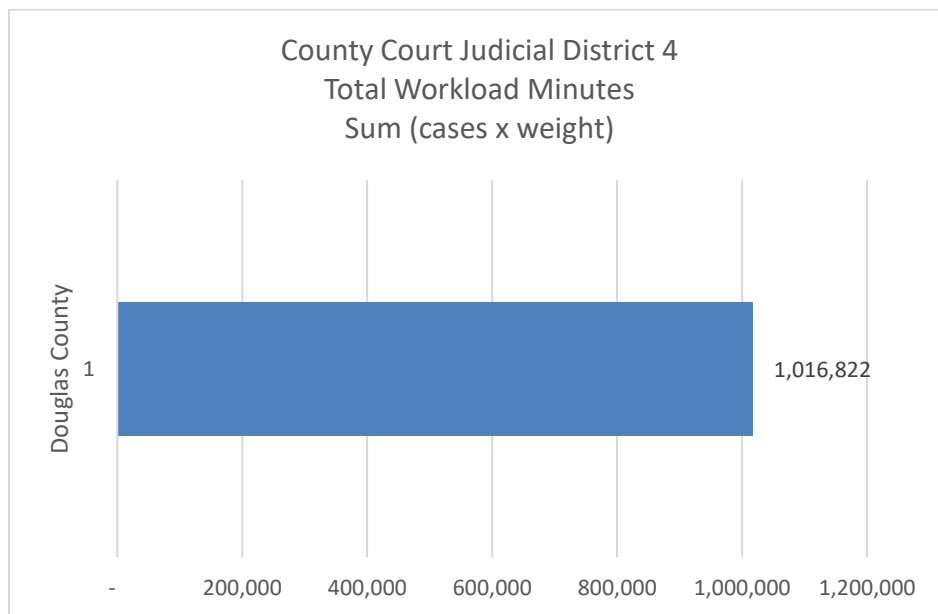
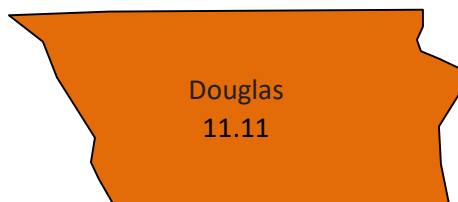
4th Judicial District –County Court

County court need for judges: 11.11
 Current number of judges: 12
 Workload per judge: 0.93

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 4th District

- Finley**
- Forsberg**
- Hansen**
- Harmon**
- Hendrix**
- Huber**
- Keim**
- Kleine (Marcuzzo)**
- Lohaus**
- McDermott**
- Mosby (Lowe)**
- Shearer**

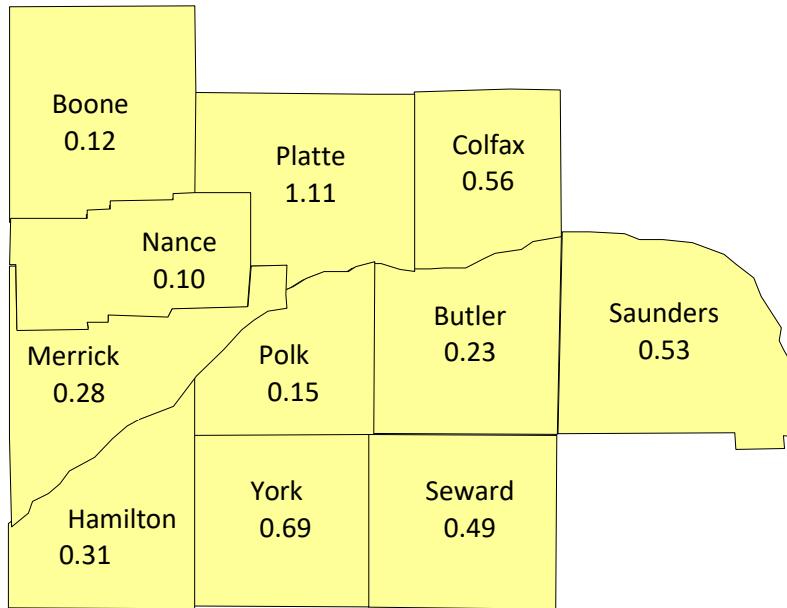


Weighted Caseload Report

5th Judicial District - County Court

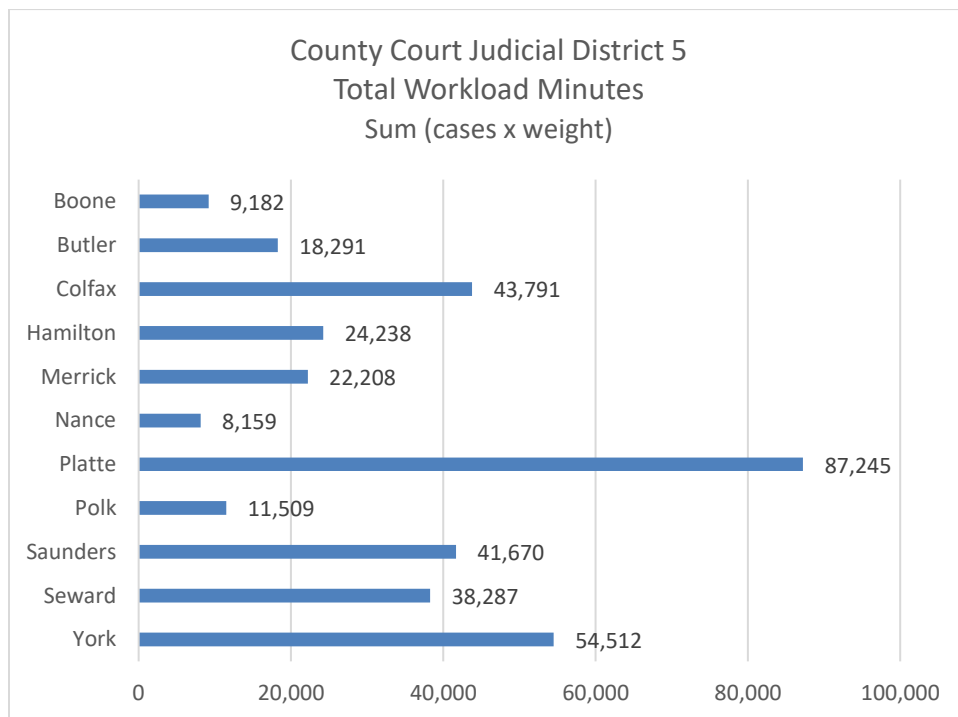
County court need for judges: 4.57
 Current number of judges: 5
 Workload per judge: 0.91

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 5th District

- Homolka
- KracI
- Lange
- Petersen
- Twiss

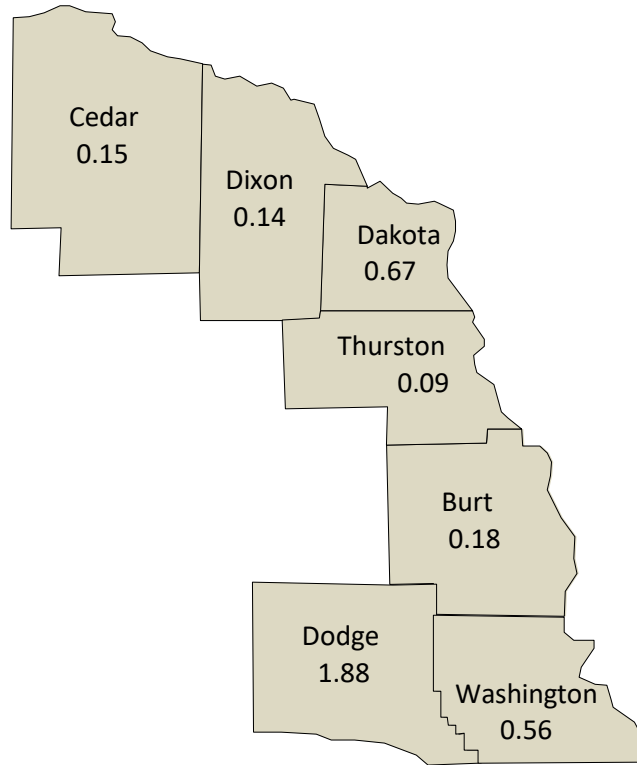


Weighted Caseload Report

6th Judicial District – County Court

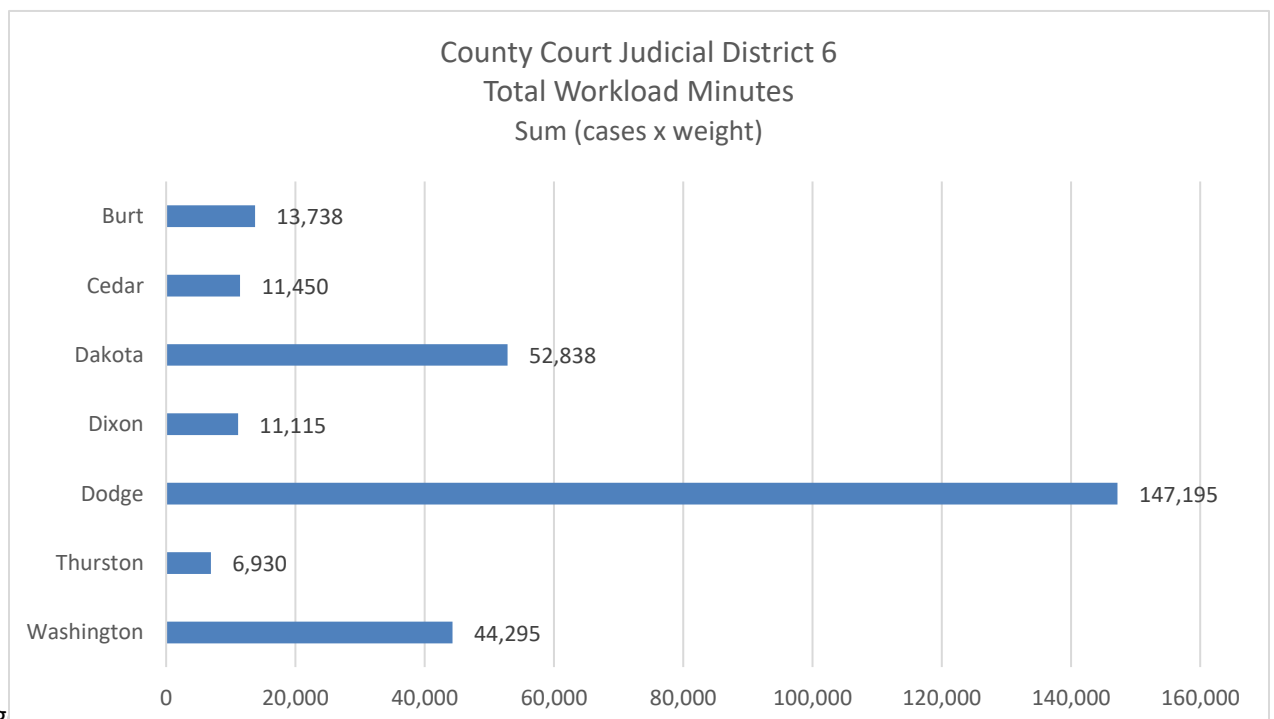
County court need for judges: 3.67
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.92

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 6th District

Barron
S. Bauer
Klein
Matney

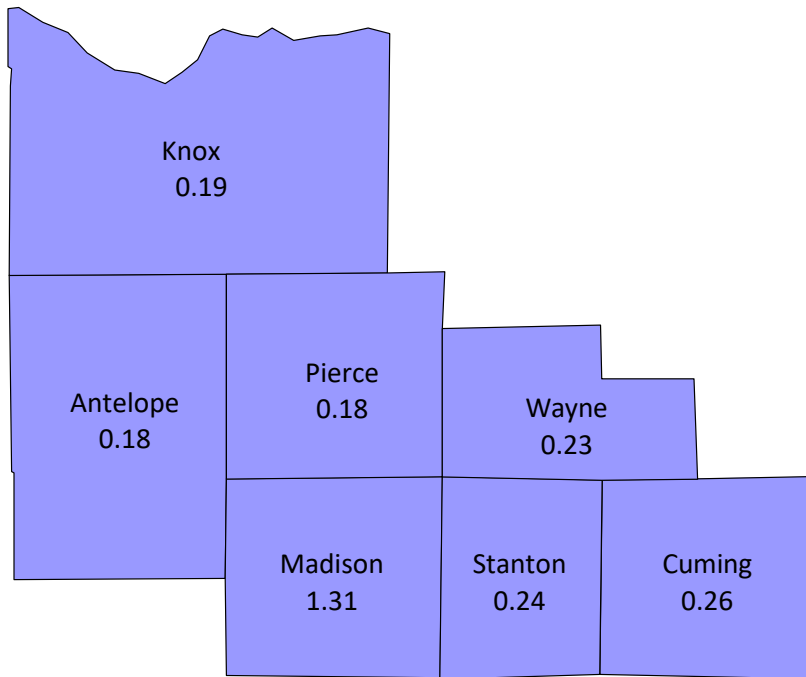


Weighted Caseload Report

7th Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 2.59
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.86

Predicted judicial resources need by county

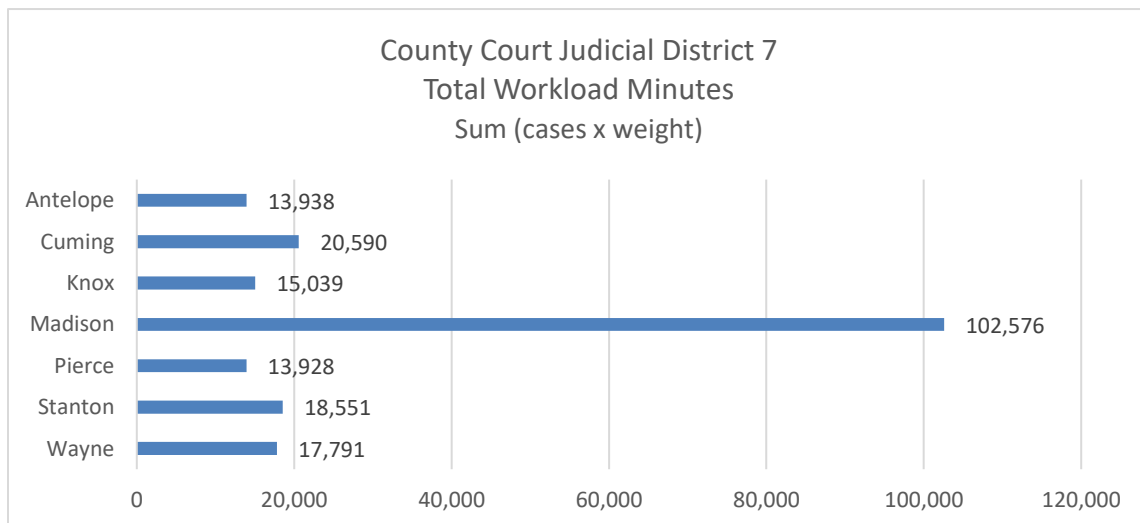


Judges Serving the 7th District

Vacant (Long)

Stoffer

Taylor

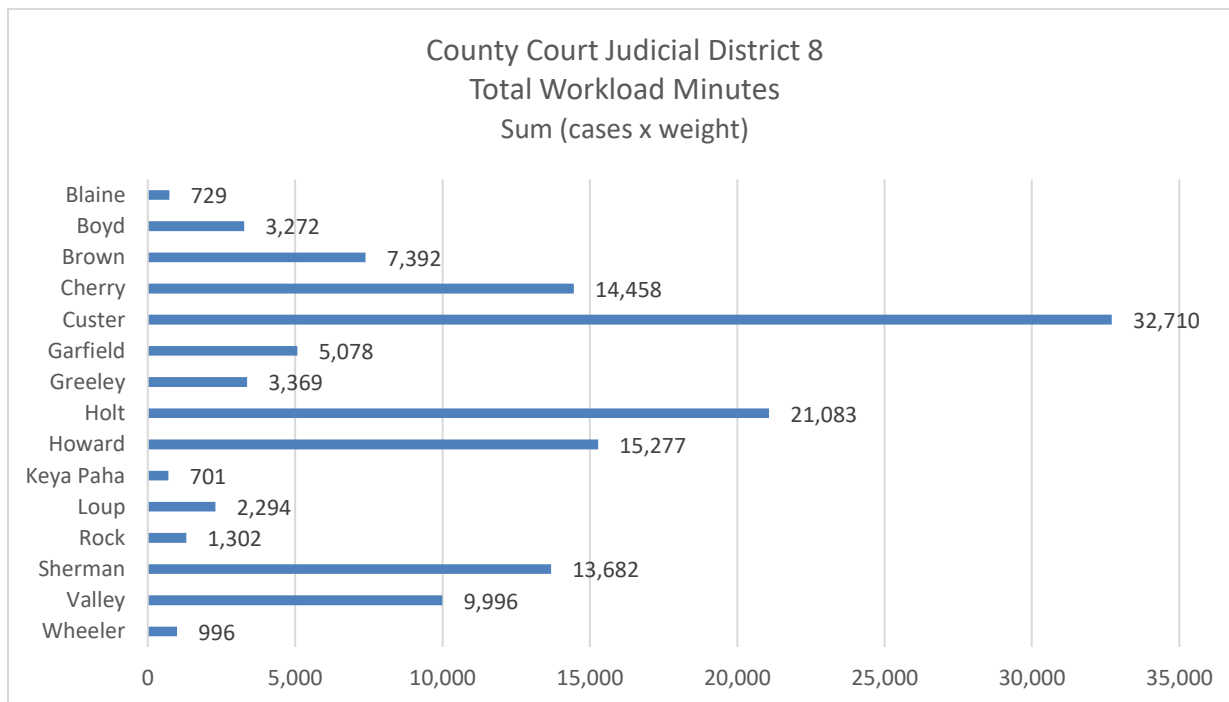
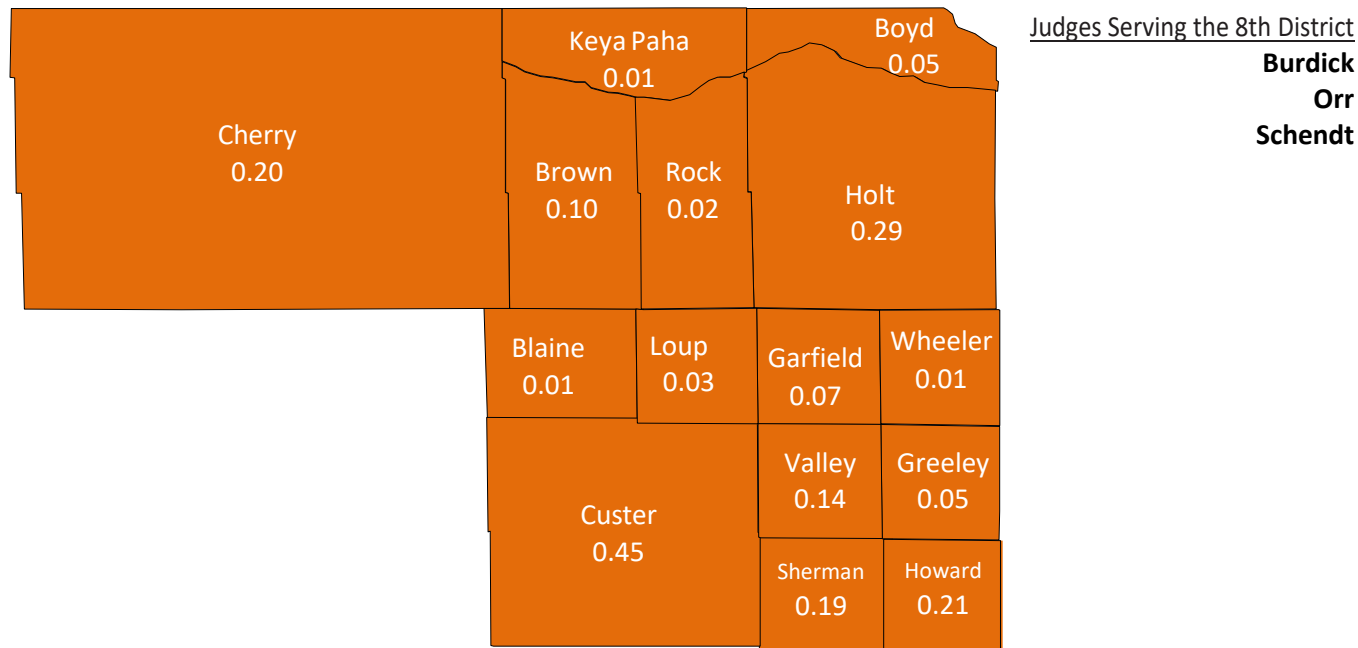


Weighted Caseload Report

8th Judicial District – County Court

County court need for judges: 1.83
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.61

Predicted judicial resources need by county

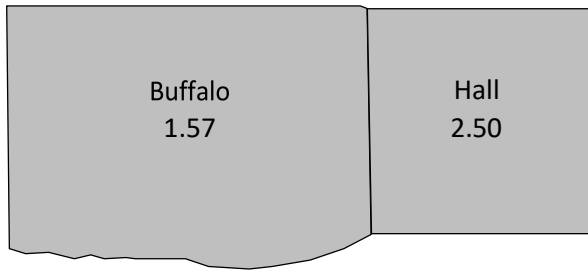


Weighted Caseload Report

9th Judicial District – County Court

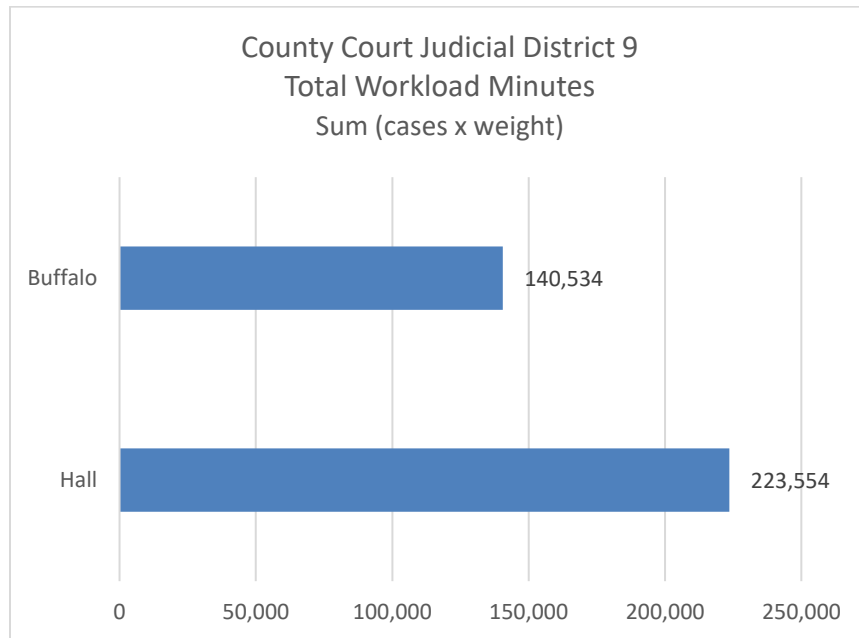
County court need for judges: 4.07
Current number of judges: 5
Workload per judge: 0.81

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 9th District

Corey
Jorgensen
McQuay
Rademacher
Wetzel



Weighted Caseload Report

10th Judicial District – County Court

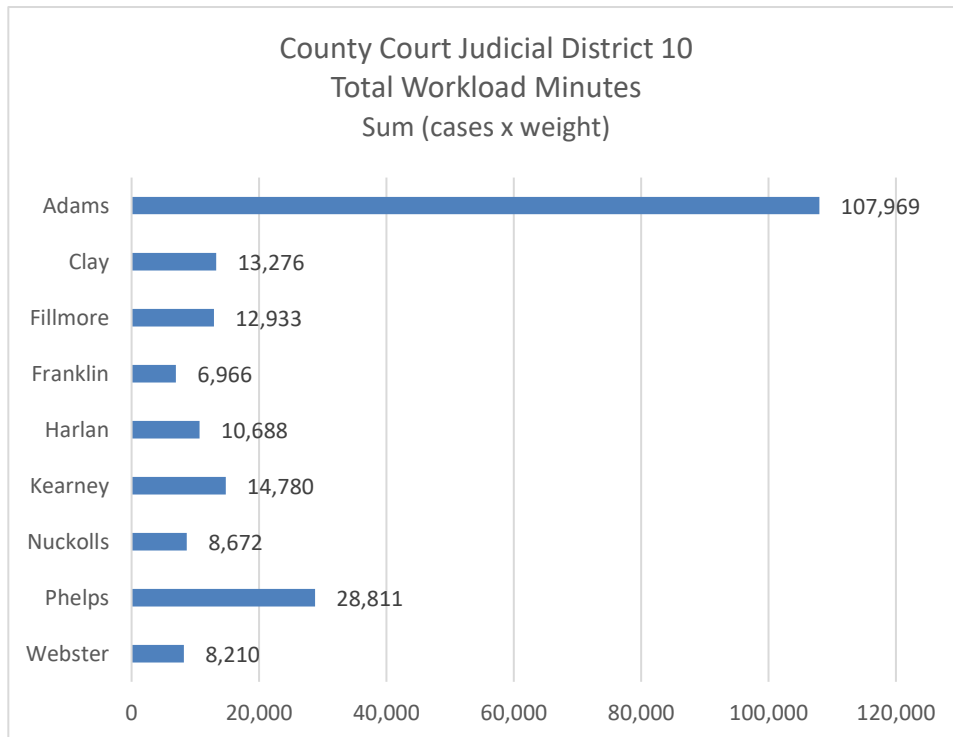
County court need for judges: 2.71
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 0.90

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Phelps 0.37	Kearney 0.19	Adams 1.38	Clay 0.17	Fillmore 0.16
Harlan 0.14	Franklin 0.09	Webster 0.10	Nuckolls 0.11	

Judges Serving the 10th District

Burns
Mead
Nelsen-Pacey (Hoeft)

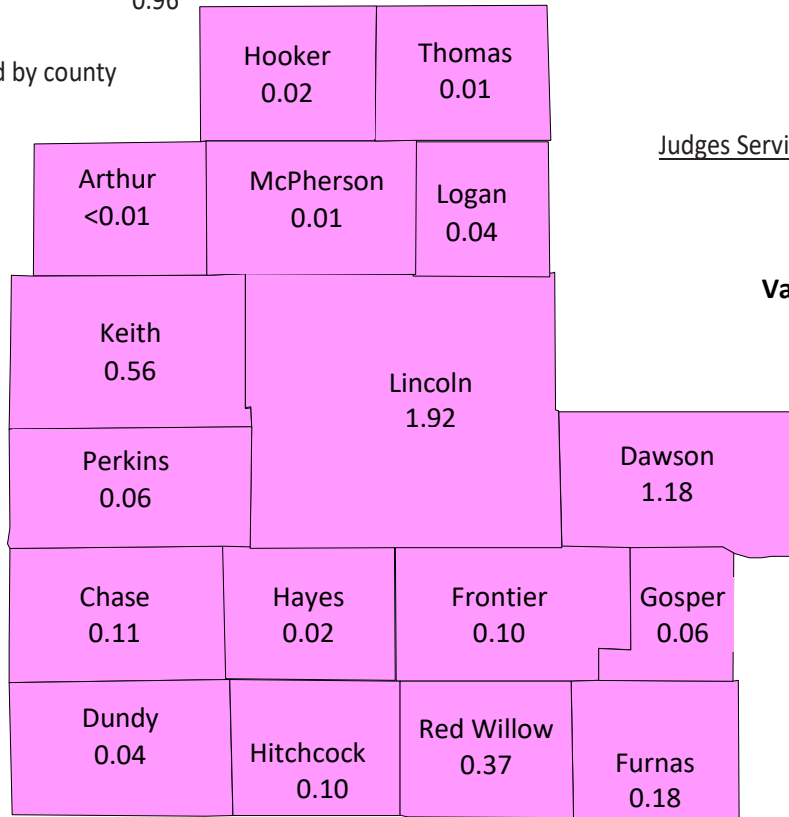


Weighted Caseload Report

11th Judicial District – County Court

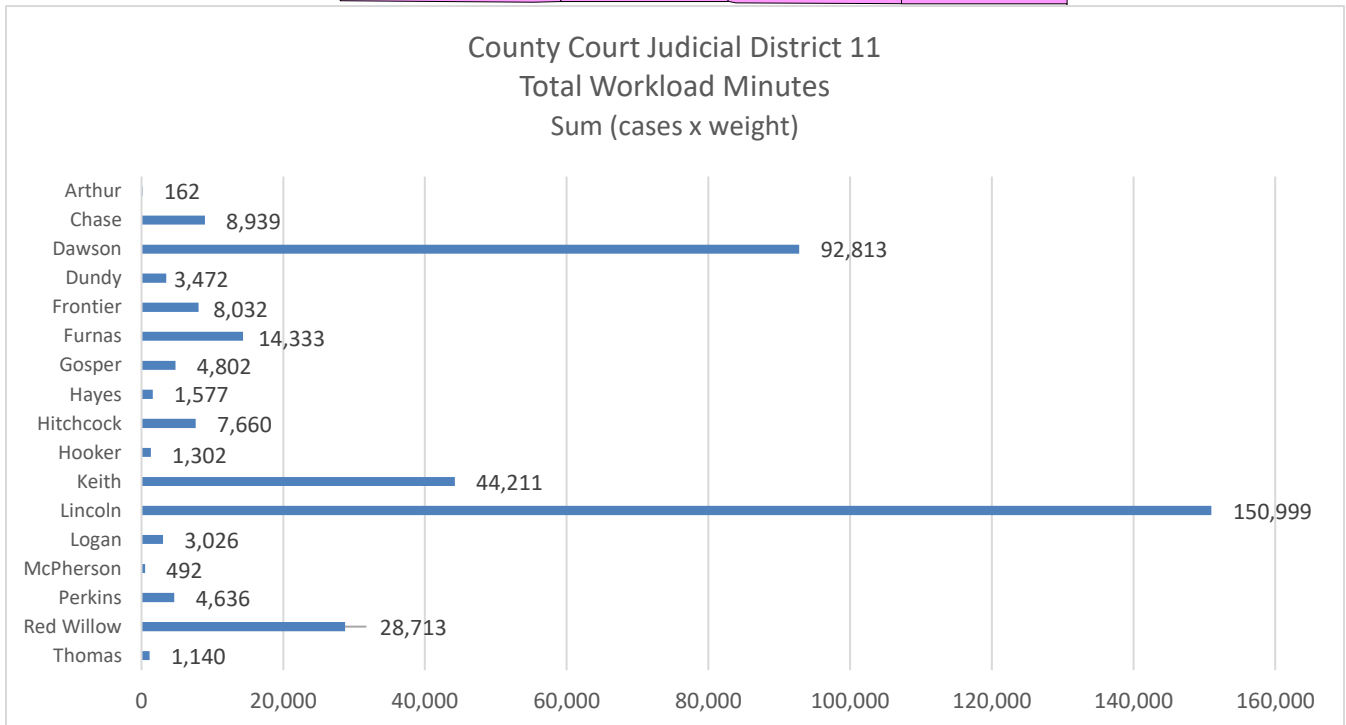
County court need for judges: 4.78
 Current number of judges: 5
 Workload per judge: 0.96

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 11th District

Jay
Paine
Roberts-Connick
Vacant (Steenburg)
Wightman

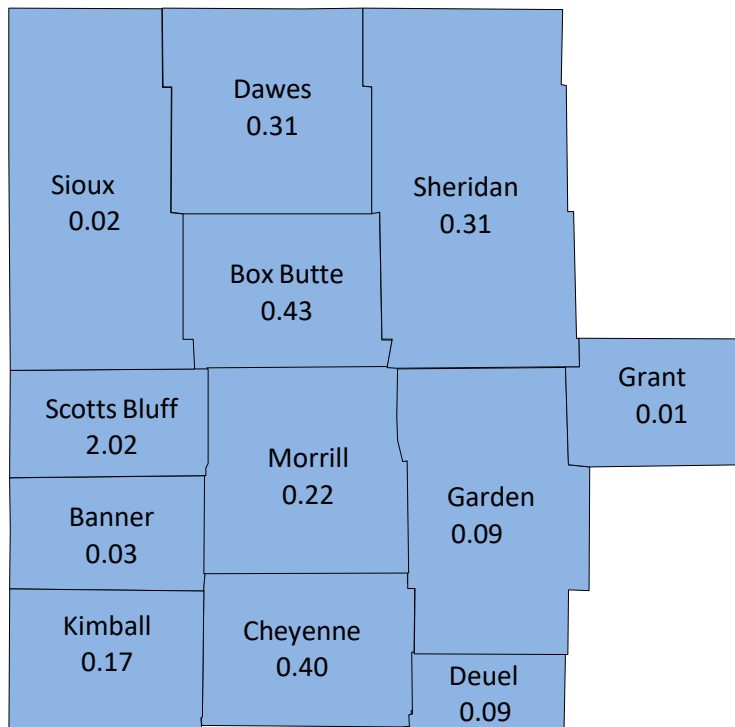


Weighted Caseload Report

12th Judicial District – County Court

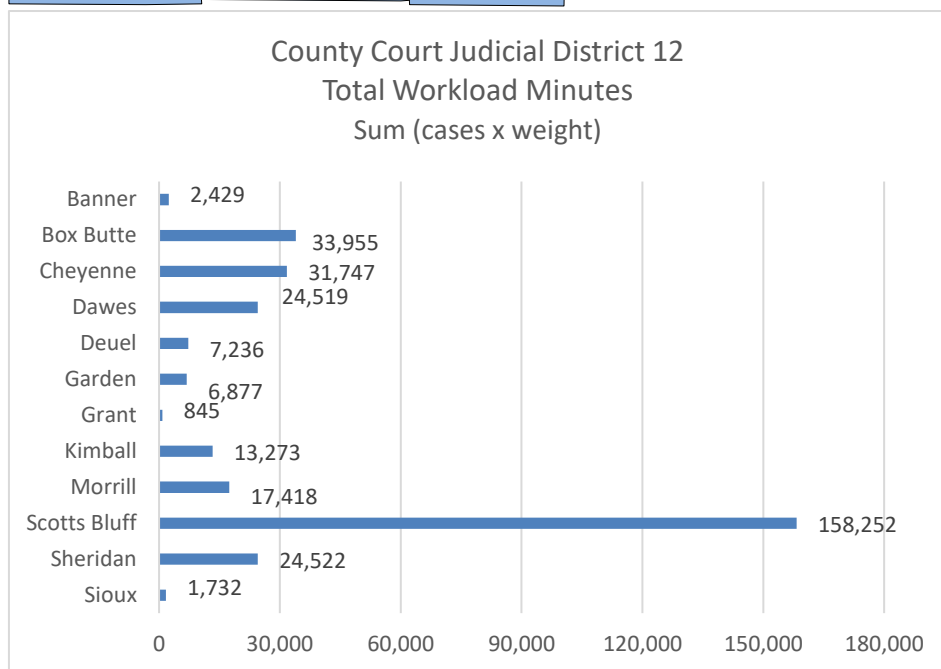
County court need for judges: 4.10
 Current number of judges: 5
 Workload per judge: 0.82

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 12th District

Conn
Mickey
Roland
Wess
Worden



Weighted Caseload Report

Court Case Type Categories and Weights – Appendix

District Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Problem Solving Court Cases	683
Protection Orders	32
Civil	219
Class I Felony	367
Other Criminal	149
Domestic Relations	97
Appeals	343
Administrative Appeals	540
County Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Protection Orders	32
Felony	26
Misdemeanor	23
District Court: Adult Problem-Solving Court	683
Traffic	1
Civil	8
Probate	61
Guardianship/Conservatorship	133
Small Claims	30
Adoption	92
Domestic Relations	97
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Juvenile: Delinquency	100
Juvenile: Status Offender 3B	37
Juvenile: Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Juvenile: Bridge to Independence (B21)	58
Juvenile: Interstate Compact Hearings/Filings	2
Juvenile: Problem-Solving Court Cases	654
Separate Juvenile Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Adoption	49
Domestic Relations	26
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Delinquency	136
Status Offender 3B	54
Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Bridge to Independence B21	36
Interstate Compact Hearing/Filings	2
Problem Solving Court Cases	654



Research and Data

Operations Division

Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation

Chief Standing Bear Justice Administration Building

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District Courts

Weighted Caseload Report



Fiscal Year 2025

July 1, 2024, to
June 30, 2025

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Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska District Courts Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska has a district court in each of its 93 counties, organized into 12 Judicial Districts. Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-301.02, the Legislature determines the number of district court judges who serve in each judicial district, and the geographic boundaries of each judicial district. An objective assessment of judicial workload allows informed decisions about district boundaries and the number of judges needed to timely resolve the cases in each judicial district.

To assist in evaluating judicial workloads, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 24-1007(1) requires the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOCB) to compile judicial workload statistics based on caseloads weighted by category of case. These weighted caseload statistics are used by the Judicial Branch, the Judicial Resources Commission, and the Legislature to evaluate judicial need, and guide decisions and recommendations on how best to allocate judicial resources across the state.

To ensure the validity, uniformity and accuracy of the AOCB's judicial workload statistics, a statewide judicial time study was conducted in 2019-2020 under the direction and leadership of the National Center for State Courts. For a full description of the judicial time study and the recommended weighting methodology and standards, see *Nebraska Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report* (October 2020) (this is noted on tables in this report with an asterisk) on the Nebraska Supreme Court Website. Because this Weighted Caseload Report uses the methodology and standards from the 2020 workload assessment, direct comparison to archived reports is not recommended.

Weighted caseload statistics approximate the number of judges a district needs to handle the current caseload based upon the calculations of a three-year rolling average of case filing data. Therefore, when weighted caseload statistics are examined in conjunction with other compelling and critical metrics, they provide a vital part of an objective and standardized assessment of judicial needs and the fair allocation of judicial resources across juvenile courts in the State of Nebraska.



Corey R. Steel

Nebraska State Court Administrator

Nebraska Supreme Court

Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation

Rm. 1211 State Capitol | P.O. Box 98910 | Lincoln, NE 68509

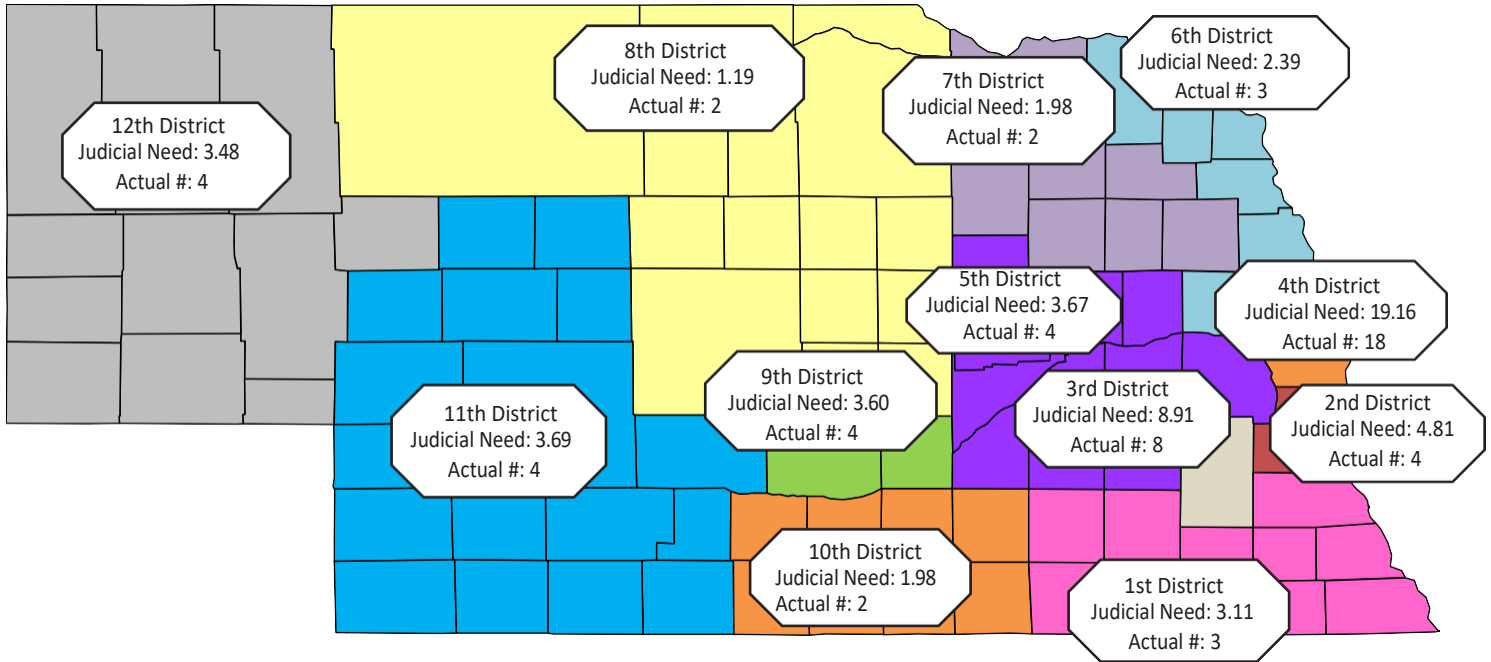
T 402.471.3730 | F 402.471.2197

www.supremecourt.nebraska.gov

Weighted Caseload Report

Nebraska District Court Judicial Needs

Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)



Note: Differences between the total District Court Need for Judges and the sum of individual counties is due to rounding to the nearest one-hundredth.

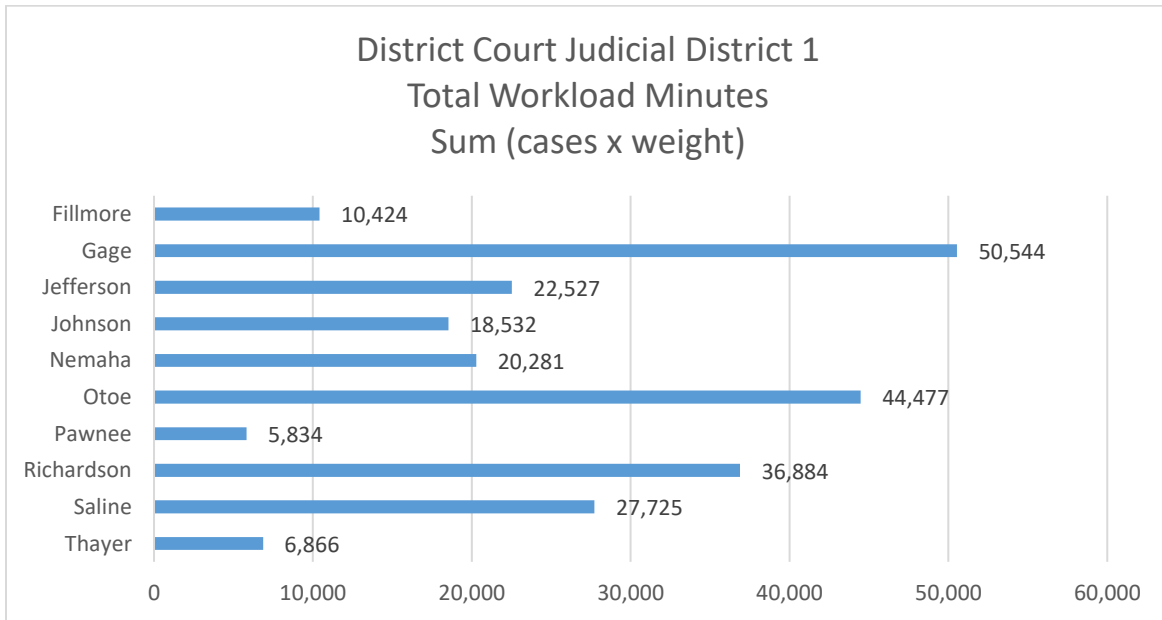
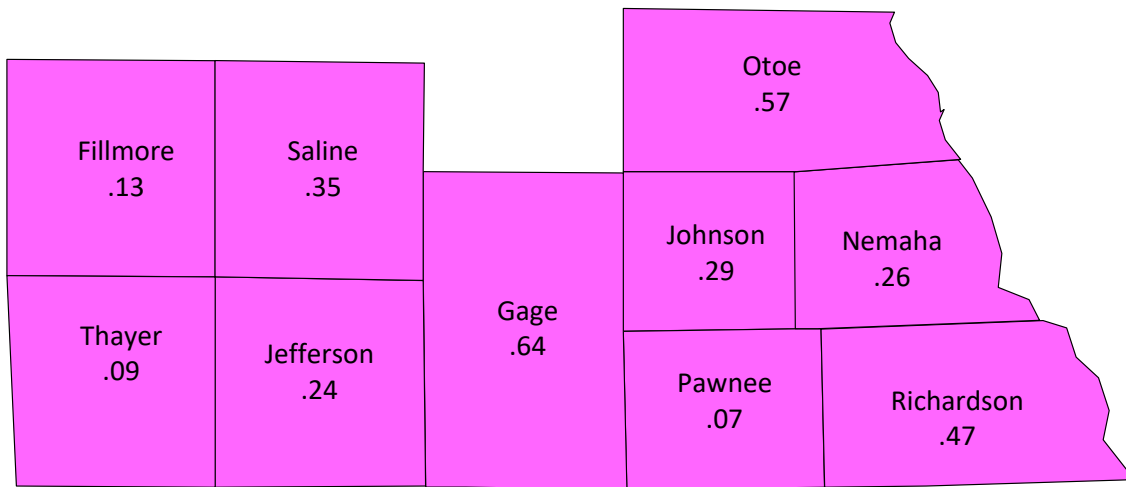
Weighted Caseload Report

1st Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.11
 Current number of judges: 3
 Workload per judge: 1.04
 Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 1st District

Bargen
Schreiner
J. Smith

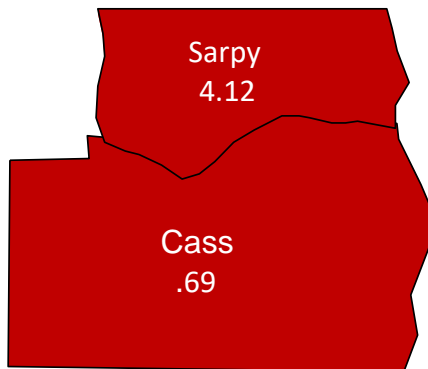


Weighted Caseload Report

2nd Judicial District – District Court

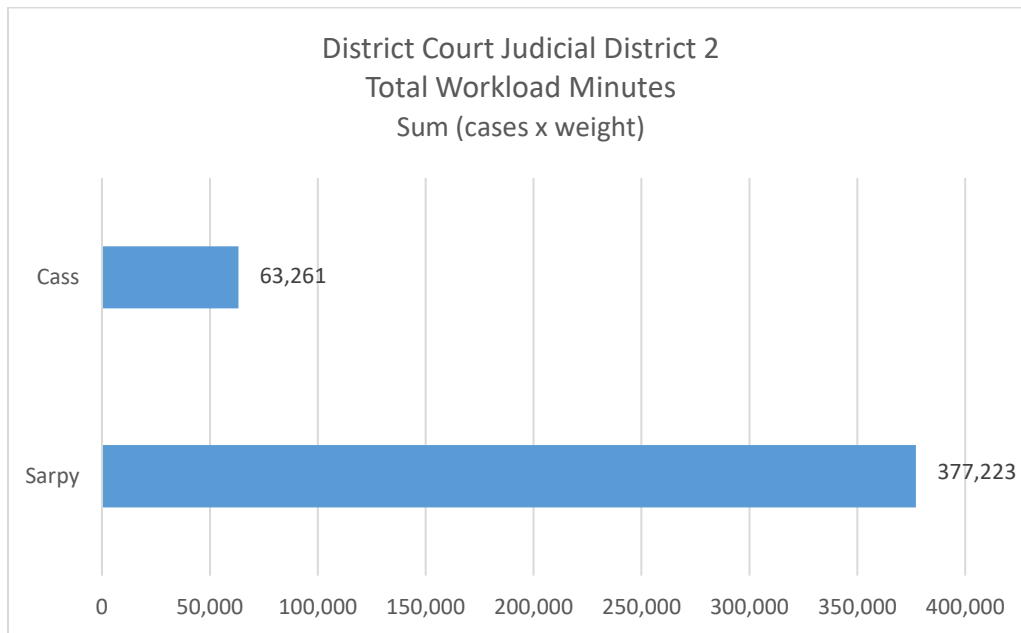
District court need for judges: 4.81
Current number of judges: 4
Workload per judge: 1.20

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 2nd District

Cox
Martinez
M. Smith
Thompson

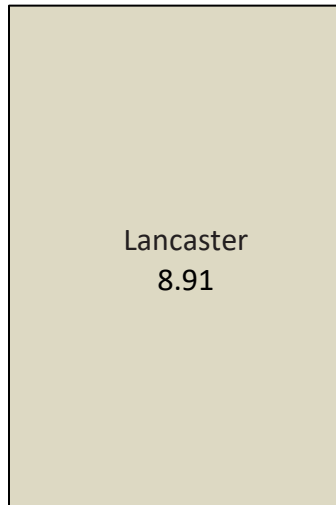


Weighted Caseload Report

3rd Judicial District – District Court

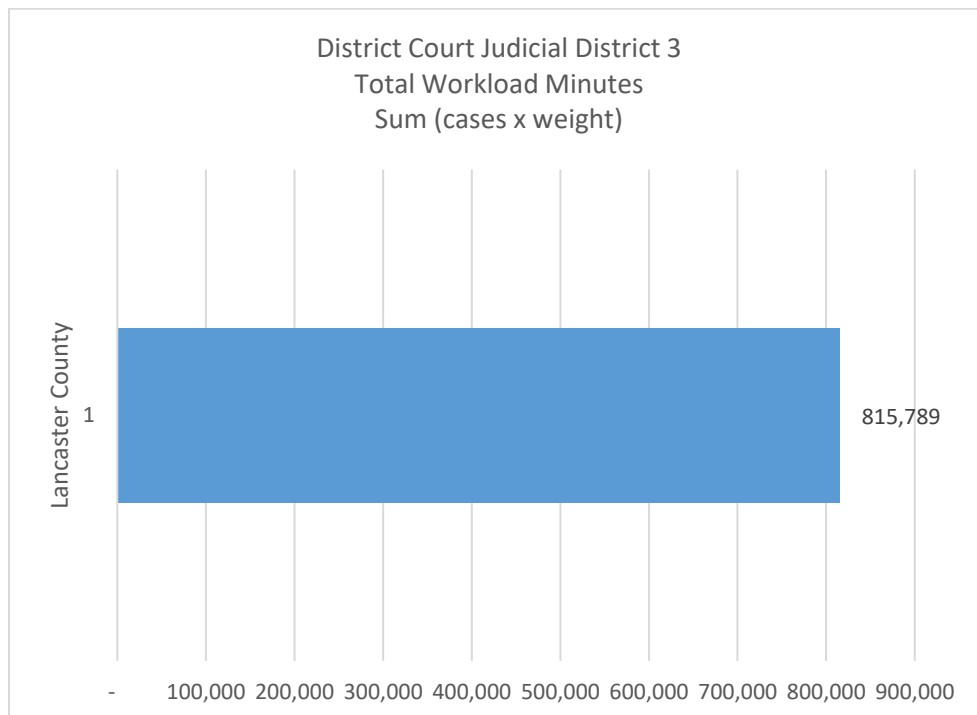
District court need for judges: 8.91
 Current number of judges: 8
 Workload per judge: 1.11

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 3rd District

- Ideus**
- Jacobsen**
- Maret**
- McManaman**
- Mellor**
- Nelson**
- Post**
- Strong**

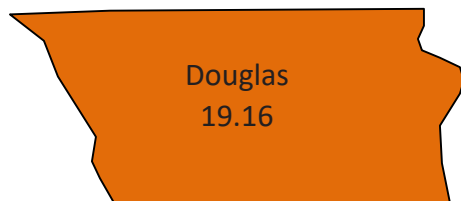


Weighted Caseload Report

4th Judicial District – District Court

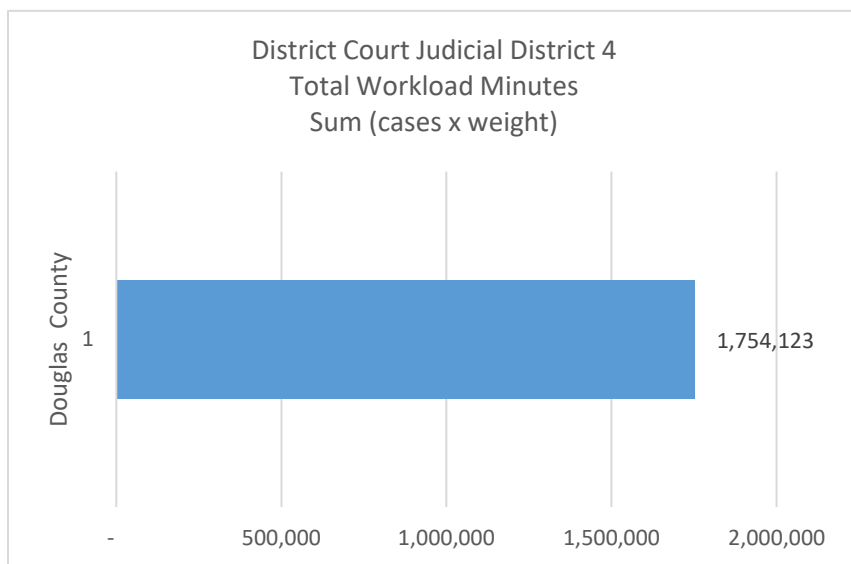
District court need for judges: 19.16
 Current number of judges: 18
 Workload per judge: 1.06

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 4th District

- Alioth**
- Bataillon**
- Benson**
- T. Burns**
- Derr**
- Dougherty**
- Engleman**
- Keane**
- Lindberg (Bowie)**
- Lux**
- Masteller**
- Miller Pankonin**
- Polk**
- Vacant (Retelsdorf)**
- Srb**
- Stratman**
- Vaughn**
- Wheelock**

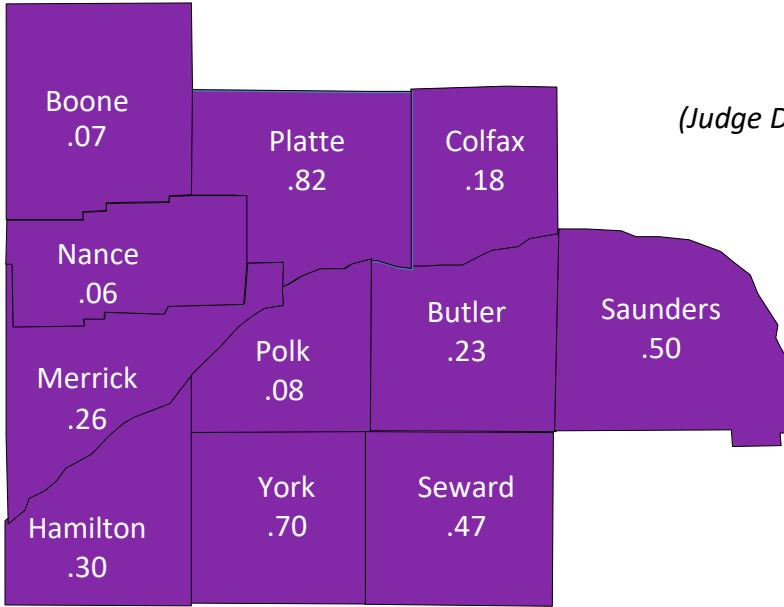


Weighted Caseload Report

5th Judicial District - District Court

District court need for judges: 3.67
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.92

Predicted judicial resources need by county

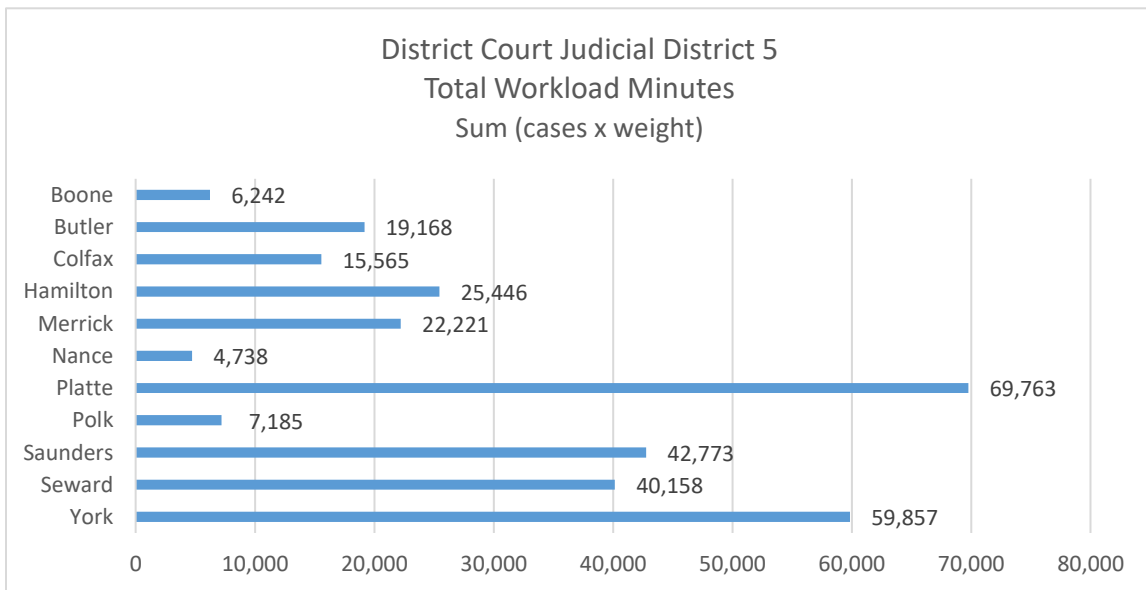


Judges Serving the 5th District

Vacant*

(Judge Doele was sworn in July 17th, 2025 – after caseloads were calculated)

Daugherty
Marroquin
Stecker

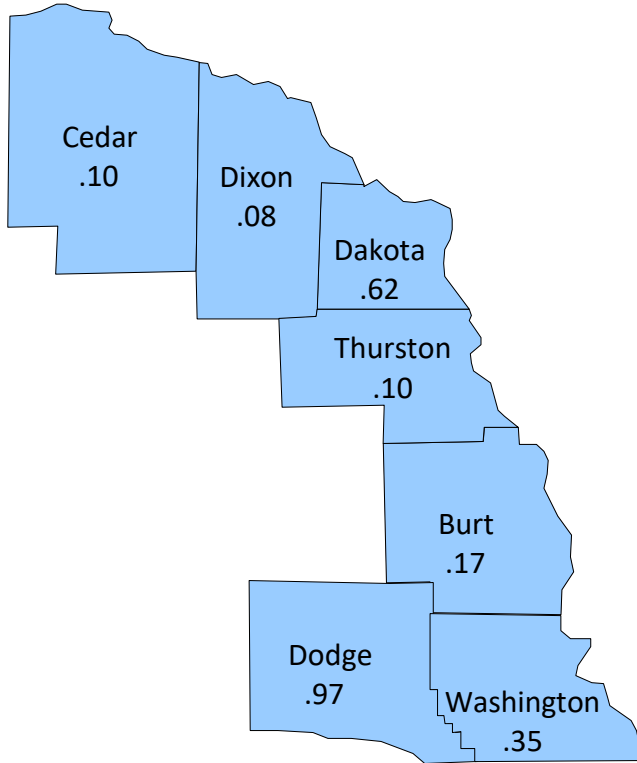


Weighted Caseload Report

6th Judicial District – District Court

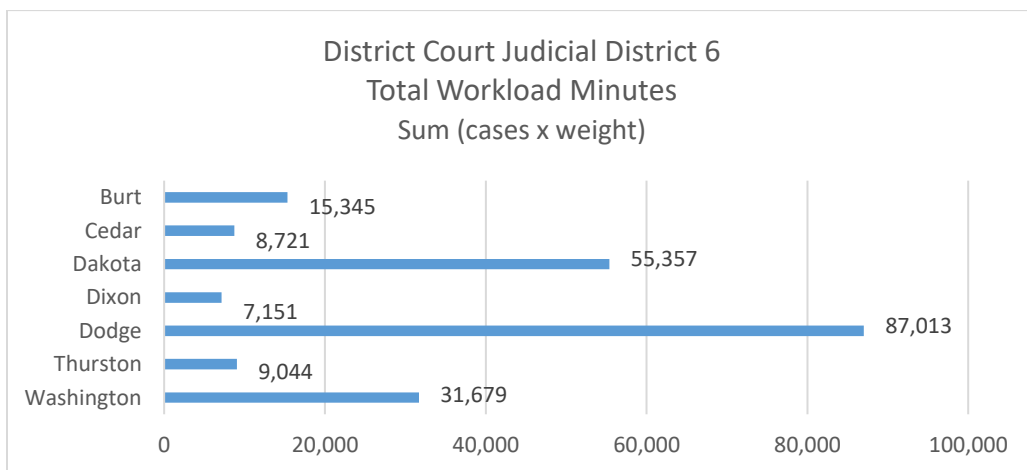
District court need for judges: 2.39
Current number of judges: 3
Workload per judge: 0.80

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 6th District

Hall
Meisner
Blackman

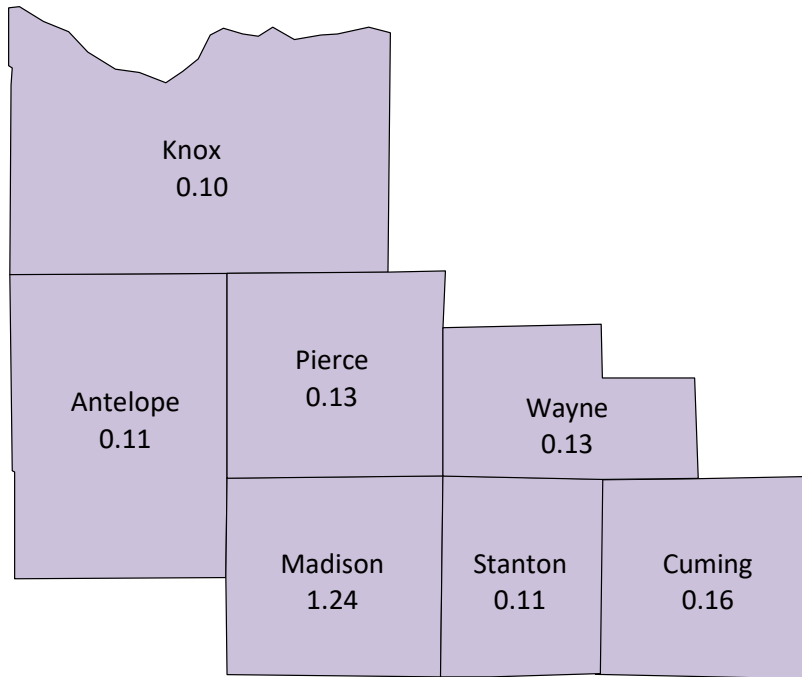


Weighted Caseload Report

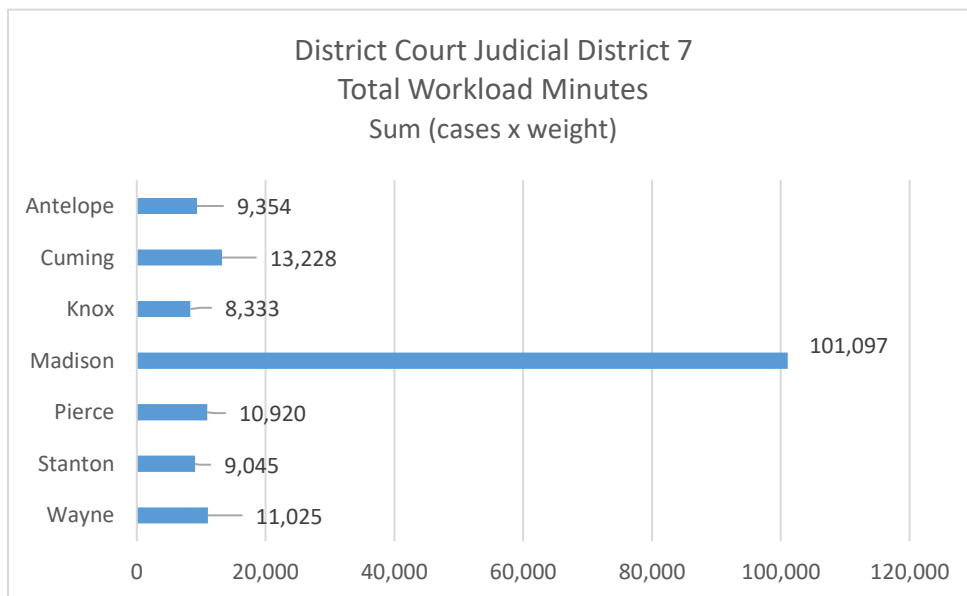
7th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 1.98
 Current number of judges: 2
 Workload per judge: 0.99

Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 7th District
Long (Johnson)
Kube



Weighted Caseload Report

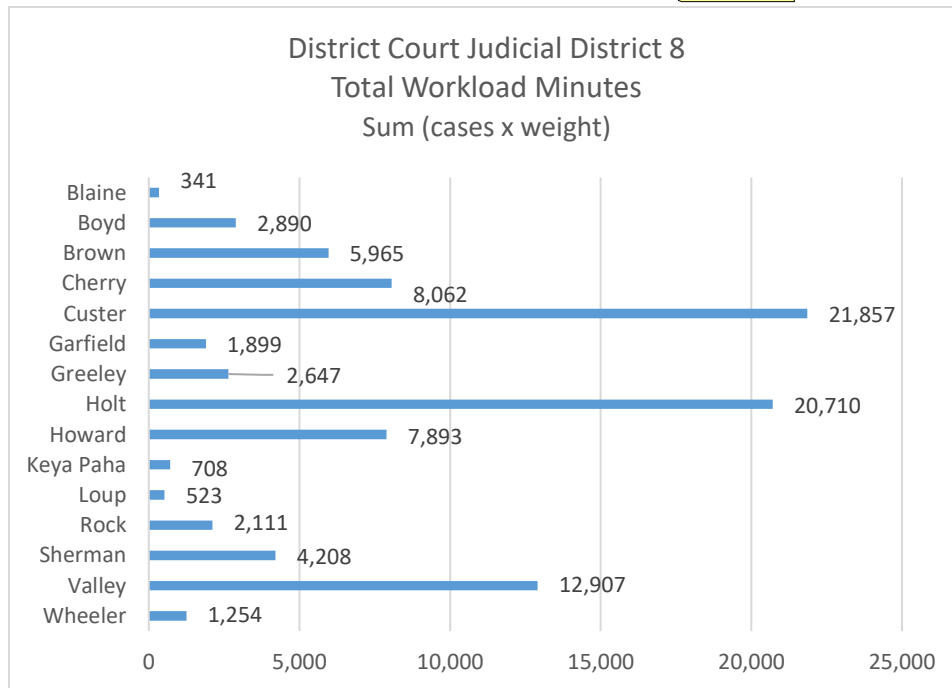
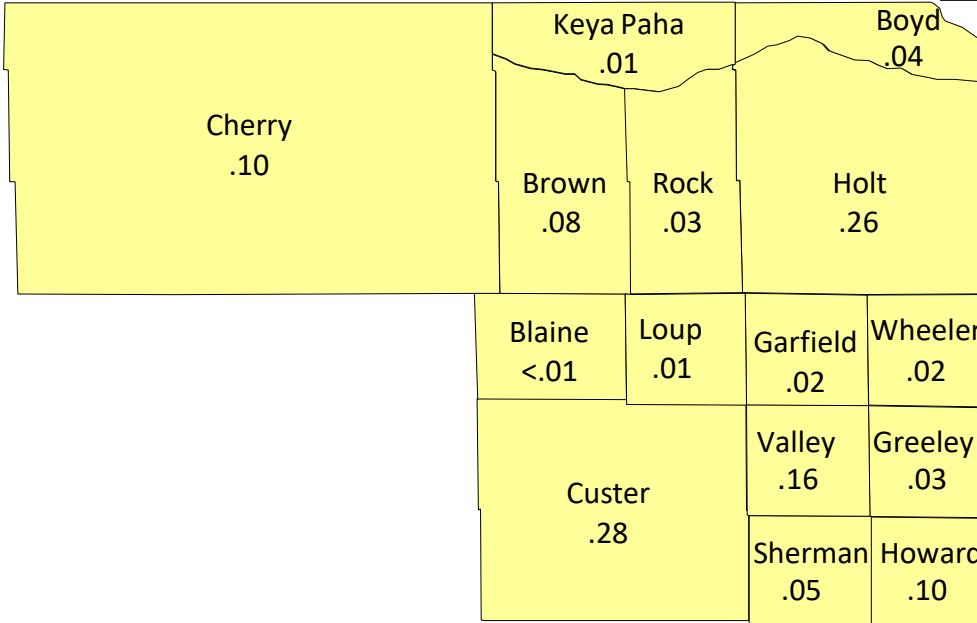
8th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 1.19
 Current number of judges: 2
 Workload per judge: 0.60

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 8th District

Kozisek
Noakes



Weighted Caseload Report

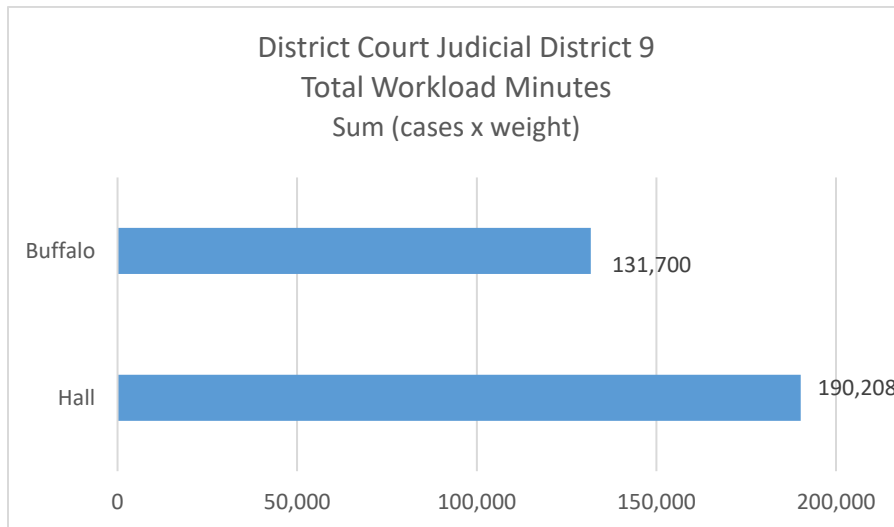
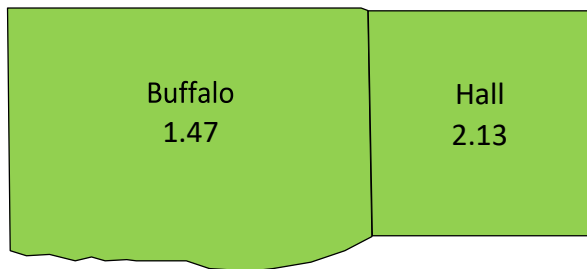
9th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.60
Current number of judges: 4
Workload per judge: 0.90

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 9th District

Butler
Lee
Marsh
Ramsey (Carson)



Weighted Caseload Report

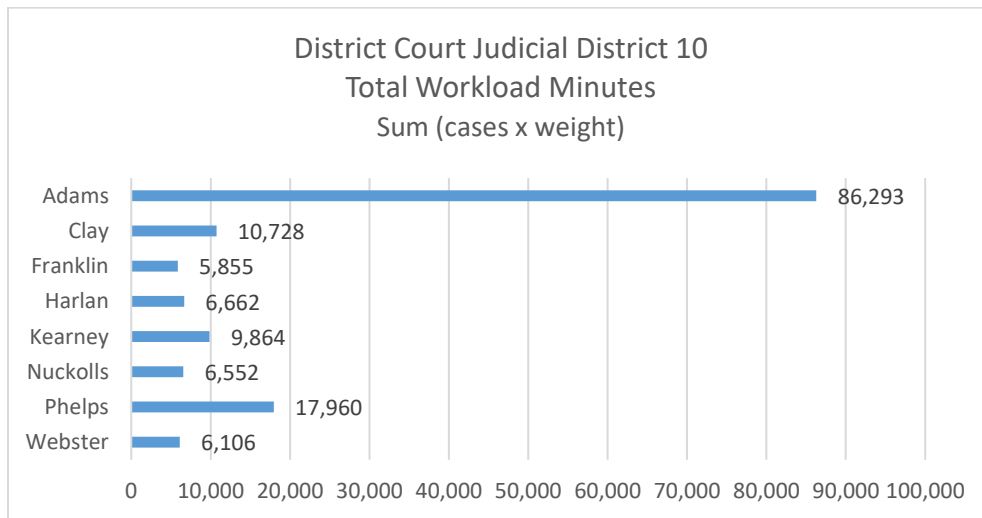
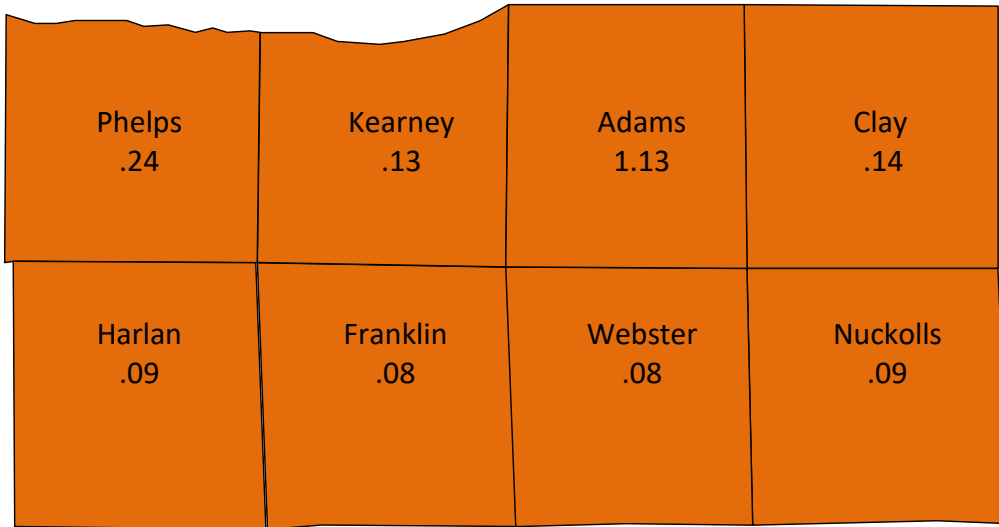
10th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 1.98
 Current number of judges: 2
 Workload per judge: 0.99

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 10th District

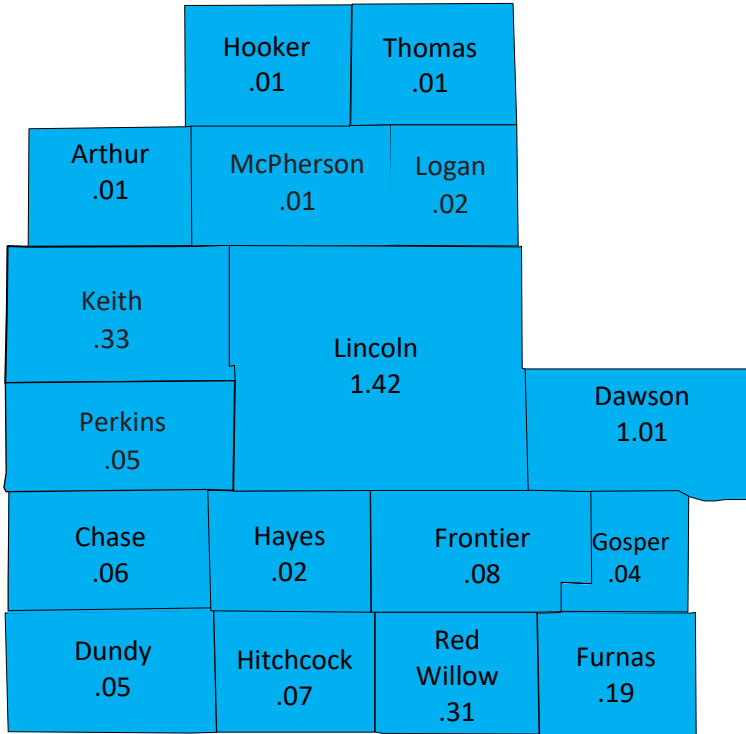
Farquhar
Hoeft



Weighted Caseload Report

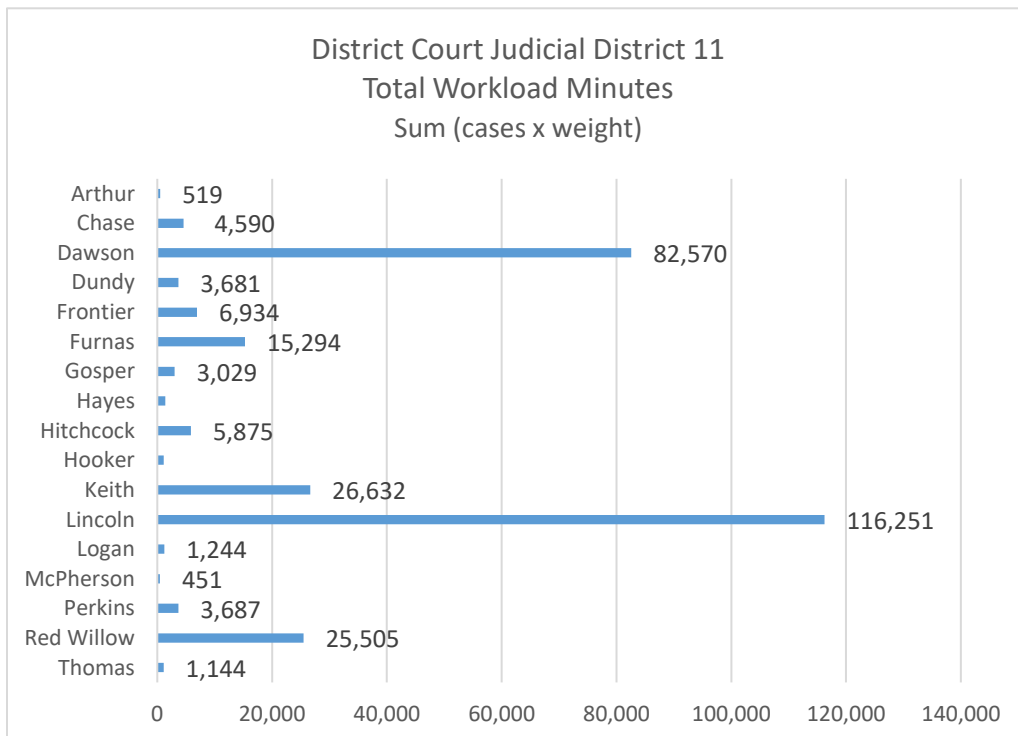
11th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.69
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.92
 Predicted judicial resources need by county



Judges Serving the 11th District

Heng
Vacant (Neher)
Piccolo
Volkmer



Weighted Caseload Report

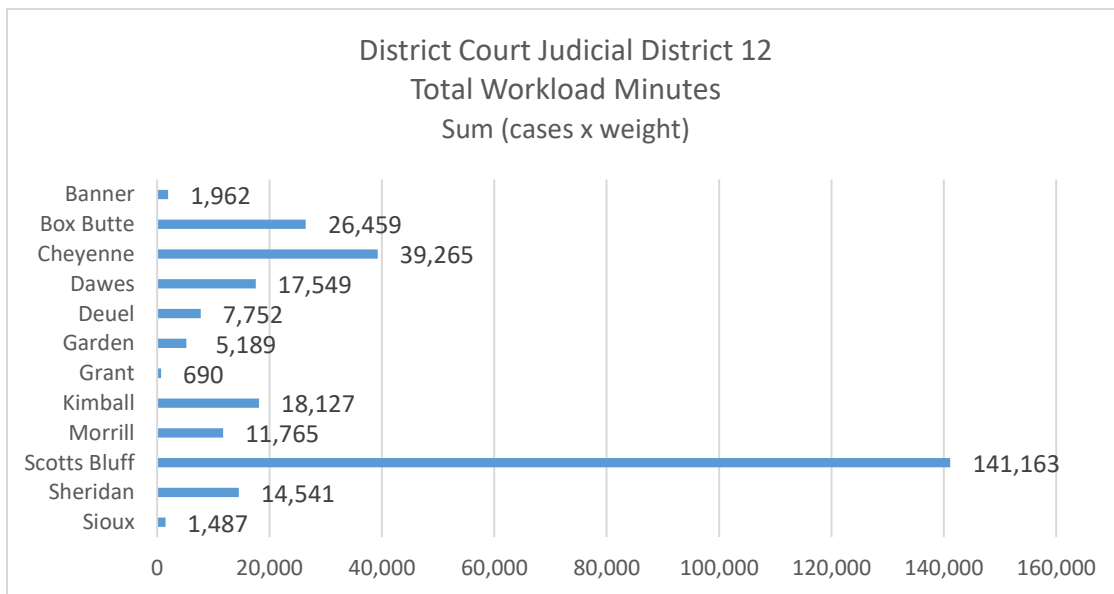
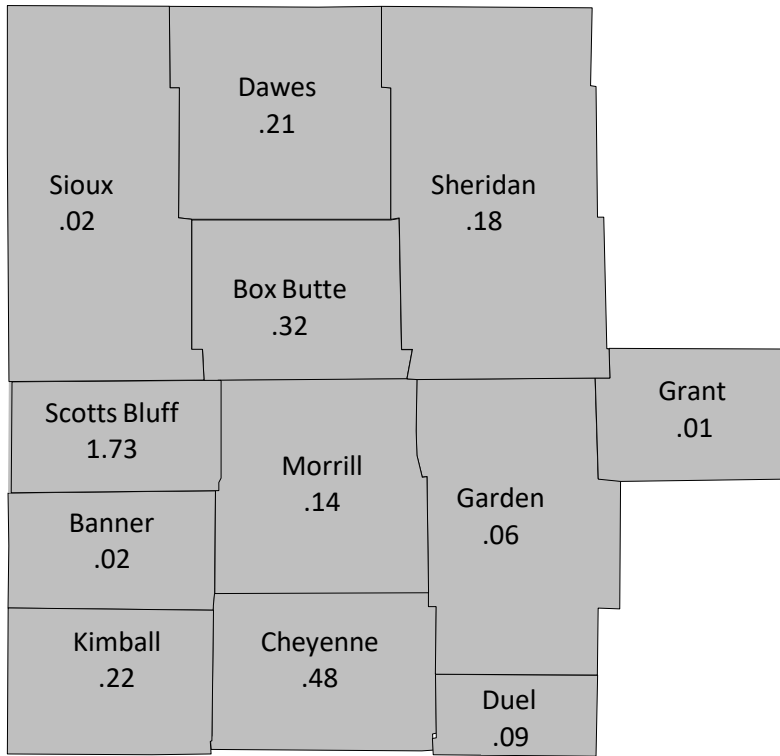
12th Judicial District – District Court

District court need for judges: 3.48
 Current number of judges: 4
 Workload per judge: 0.87

Predicted judicial resources need by county

Judges Serving the 12th District

Dobrovlny
Miller
O’Gorman
Weimer



Weighted Caseload Report

Court Case Type Categories and Weights – Appendix

District Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Problem Solving Court Cases	683
Protection Orders	32
Civil	219
Class I Felony	367
Other Criminal	149
Domestic Relations	97
Appeals	343
Administrative Appeals	540
County Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Protection Orders	32
Felony	26
Misdemeanor	23
District Court: Adult Problem-Solving Court	683
Traffic	1
Civil	8
Probate	61
Guardianship/Conservatorship	133
Small Claims	30
Adoption	92
Domestic Relations	97
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Juvenile: Delinquency	100
Juvenile: Status Offender 3B	37
Juvenile: Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Juvenile: Bridge to Independence (B21)	58
Juvenile: Interstate Compact Hearings/Filings	2
Juvenile: Problem-Solving Court Cases	654
Separate Juvenile Court Case Types	Case Weight* (minutes)
Adoption	49
Domestic Relations	26
Juvenile: 3A Children	487
Delinquency	136
Status Offender 3B	54
Mentally Ill and Dangerous 3C	265
Bridge to Independence B21	36
Interstate Compact Hearing/Filings	2
Problem Solving Court Cases	654



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Chief Standing Bear Justice Administration Building

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2021

Public Hearing Date: Type	Total Applied	Total Nominated
01/29/2021: County, 5 th	4	2
01/28/2021: District, 3 rd	4	2
02/17/2021: County, 1 st	4	3
03/25/2021: District, 4 th (Two vacancies)	10	6
07/21/2021: Juvenile, Sarpy	8	3
08/18/2021: District, 4 th	7	5
10/18/2021: District, 9 th	3	2
10/21/2021: District, 4 th (Two vacancies)	7	4
10/26/2021: District, 11 th	6	2
10/27/2021: County, 11 th	3	3
TOTALS	56	32

2022

Public Hearing Date: Type	Total Applied	Total Nominated
01/10/2022: District, 10 th	6	3
03/24/2022: District, 5 th	4	2
04/05/2022: District 1 st	3	3
06/02/2022): District, 4 th (New. LB922 (2022))	3	3
07/20/2022: County, 1 st	3	2
07/20/2022: County, 5 th	4	2
07/28/2022: Juvenile, Sarpy	6	2
08/18/2022: District, 11 th	5	2
08/31/2022: County, 2 nd	7	3
10/27/2022: County, 6 th	7	3
10/27/2022: County, 12 th	4	3
TOTALS	52	28

2023

Public Hearing Date: Type	Total Applied	Total Nominated
02/01/2023: District, 3 rd	3	2
07/07/2023: County, 9 th	6	2
07/27/2023: District, 4 th	7	4
10/26/2023: County, 4 th	7	4
08/09/2023: County, 6 th	7	4
10/26/2023: District, 11 th	2	2
TOTALS	32	18

2024

Public Hearing Date: Type	Total Applied	Total Nominated
03/26/2024: District, 6 th	6	4
03/26/2024: Workers' Comp	4	2
07/16/2025: District, 10 th	5	2
10/04/2024: Supreme, Chief Justice	4	4
10/17/2024: County, 10 th	9	3
12/12/2024: Supreme, 5 th	3	3
TOTALS	31	18

2025

Public Hearing Date: Type	Total Applied	Total Nominated
01/24/2025: District, 9 th	7	2
01/24/2025: County, 4 th	8	5
02/21/2025: County, 4 th	6	4
02/27/2025: District, 4 th	7	4
03/20/2025: Appeals, 4 th	5	3
03/14/2025: District, 7 th	2	0
04/23/2025	3	2
05/16/2025: District, 5 th	6	3
06/03/2025: County, 11 th	3	2
06/02/2025: District, 11 th	3	0
07/22/2025	6	2
09/17/2025: County, 2 nd	7	2
09/24/2025: County, 3 rd	7	4
09/30/2025: District, 4 th	7	4
10/16/2025: Supreme, 2 nd	2	2
10/02/2025: County, 7 th	2	0
11/18/2025	7	3
Totals	88	42

2026

Public Hearing Date: Type	Total Applied	Total Nominated
01/05/2026: District, 7 th	2	2
01/16/2026: County, 5 th	8	5
03/20/2026: County, 9 th	3	2
03/24/2026: District, 4 th	7	4
03/26/2026: County, 7 th	5	4
03/27/2026: Appeals, 6 th	5	2
03/23/2026: District, 3 rd	2	0
05/07/2026	4	<i>Not held yet</i>
03/17/2026: County, 12 th	4	0
04/17/2026	3	0
06/12/2026		
Totals	43	19

Nebraska State Bar Association

Listening Sessions on the Declining Rural Lawyer Population

Introduction

In 2026, the Nebraska State Bar Association (NSBA) convened a series of Rural Listening Sessions to better understand the challenges facing lawyers, courts, and communities in rural Nebraska due to a declining lawyer population. These sessions were designed to gather practitioner-level insights into the declining rural lawyer population and to discuss potential strategies for increasing access to legal services in rural Nebraska. Sessions were held in Nebraska City, Broken Bow, Hastings, Kearney, Norfolk, North Platte, O'Neill, South Sioux City, Beatrice, Columbus and Scottsbluff. Approximately 150 lawyers and judges participated in the listening sessions.

Core Themes and Findings

1. Court-Appointed Work and Compensation

A dominant theme across all sessions was the declining number of lawyers available to take court appointments in criminal and juvenile cases. Many lawyers emphasized that court appointments are essential for training new lawyers, yet the low compensation discourages participation and contributes to burnout among those who remain on appointment lists. While many jurisdictions have recently increased the court-appointment rate, participants consistently reported that current rates are often so significantly below market value that it is a financial burden to take court appointments and that with developments in the areas of electronic/cell phone evidence, immigration consequences, and adolescent brain development, these cases have become more complex.

Many lawyers further observed that County Boards are resistant to increases in court-appointed counsel rates. As a result, some participants questioned whether addressing compensation on a statewide basis by statute, rather than at the county level, would be a more effective approach.

Several sessions raised concerns about the lack of uniformity statewide, including differences in whether mileage and/or drive-time would be reimbursed and whether attorneys can bill for paralegal time related to court appointed cases. When the court appointed counsel rate is already low, instances where judges reduce lawyers' bills without adequate justification, erodes willingness to remain on the list for court appointments. Ethical concerns were also raised regarding review of local court appointed counsel bills by county attorneys in a few jurisdictions, which is currently allowed by statute.

Currently, to be appointed as a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) in Nebraska one is required to complete a 6-hour training and 3 additional CLE hours specific to GAL issues each year thereafter. Some participants indicated that the additional training requirement was a real barrier to having more GALs. Others encouraged the NSBA to offer more CLEs in this area, stating that with few options available, they take the same OnDemand CLE program year after year. In some districts, lawyers believed individuals remained on GAL appointment lists despite not meeting ongoing CLE requirements, while other districts applied stricter standards.

2. Access to Family Law Lawyers

Across rural Nebraska, participants consistently described a significant and growing shortage of lawyers willing to handle family law matters. Particularly contested matters, matters involving custody and situations involving domestic violence. Many communities reported that for family law matters, litigants frequently had to hire lawyers located hours away. Firms reported that if they were able to hire someone willing to do family law or if someone opened a practice to do family law, they would have a full case load upon starting. Participants noted that this shortage has led to higher numbers of self-represented litigants.

3. Hiring, Retention, and Workforce Pipeline

Every session reported persistent challenges with recruiting and retaining lawyers. Participants described interviewing candidates for years without successful hires, losing associates after

significant investments in training, and, in some areas, competing with government offices that offer higher or more stable compensation and benefits.

Housing availability, spousal employment opportunities, and the difficulty of integrating solo practitioners who are not originally from the community were repeatedly identified as barriers. Several sessions also noted a perception that lawyers with personal or family ties to rural Nebraska are the most likely to remain in practice, while new graduates without those connections are more likely to leave. For this reason, participants emphasized encouraging more rural Nebraskans to consider careers in the law as a critical long-term strategy for sustaining the rural legal workforce.

Pipeline and Outreach

The Rural Law Opportunities Program (RLOP) and Kearney Law Opportunities Program (KLOP) were widely viewed as among the most promising efforts to expand the pipeline of future rural lawyers. Early data indicate that more than 70 percent of RLOP/KLOP students who complete law school return to rural Nebraska to practice. Participants discussed ways to strengthen and support the program, including increased promotion, expanded scholarship opportunities, and the availability of additional internship placements for RLOP/KLOP students.

Participants also noted a significant decline in mock trial programs across Nebraska and questioned whether designating mock trial as an official NSAA activity could help encourage broader participation by schools. Sessions highlighted opportunities to leverage existing civic education programs—such as Girls State, Boys State, and County Government Day—to introduce students to the legal profession and the court system. Several participants suggested pairing Nebraska Supreme Court and Court of Appeals traveling oral arguments with attorney panels or educational programming to increase student exposure to legal careers.

Law Clerk Housing

Participants noted that firms reporting greater success with hiring often begin building relationships early through summer law clerkships. Many participants identified the availability of temporary, affordable housing as a significant barrier to hiring summer law clerks, particularly when students are

not from the area or do not have local family connections. Strategies discussed included promoting summer housing options available through universities and colleges located in rural parts of the state. In at least one session, participants noted that a local chamber of commerce provides housing specifically to support recruitment of professionals to the area. Participants suggested that identifying and promoting similar housing opportunities could be a valuable resource for employers seeking to hire summer law clerks.

Expanding the Candidate Pool

Participants observed that many current recruitment efforts focus primarily on attracting new graduates from Creighton University School of Law and the University of Nebraska College of Law. While those efforts were viewed as very important, participants emphasized the need for the Nebraska State Bar Association to build stronger relationships with law schools in neighboring states, particularly to reconnect with students who are originally from Nebraska. Participants also questioned whether additional strategies could be developed to engage lawyers who have been in practice for several years and may be seeking a change, and to encourage those practitioners to consider returning to rural communities.

Incentives

There was uniform and strong support across sessions for expanding student loan repayment assistance as a recruitment and retention tool for legal employers in rural areas. At the urging of the NSBA, legislation was passed in 2026 that expands the number of counties eligible for the program by increasing the population threshold from counties with populations of less than 15,000 residents to counties with populations up to 75,000 residents.

Participants also shared examples of community-based incentives that have supported recruitment efforts in the past. For example, one participant described receiving a \$5,000 relocation incentive to move to North Platte, which was matched by the hiring law firm. Others reported financial incentives that enabled them to purchase buildings for law offices.

The Nebraska Relocation Incentive Act (NRIA), enacted through LB 1023 in 2024, offers refundable tax credits for employers and income tax exclusions for employees who relocate to Nebraska for jobs

paying between \$70,000 and \$250,000, effective January 1, 2025. It aims to attract talent by supporting relocation expenses and offering income tax breaks for up to two years.

Participants suggested that identifying and promoting financial incentives currently available through the state, county economic development offices, and/or chambers of commerce—whether aimed at recruiting professionals to a community or supporting new law firms or satellite offices—could be a valuable resource for lawyers considering rural practice. Participants also recommended exploring the creation of new incentives such as tax incentives, housing stipends, or financial support for hiring law clerks (like what was formerly provided through the Intern Nebraska program which recently lost funding).

4. County Attorney and Public Defender Vacancies

Participants consistently reported persistent vacancies and staffing instability in county attorney and public defender offices, particularly in rural districts. Across several sessions, participants described positions remaining unfilled for extended periods, limited applicant pools, and an increase in counties with no candidates for elections for these positions. In some districts, offices that previously attracted dozens of applicants now receive only a handful of applications when vacancies arise.

These vacancies have significant downstream effects. In multiple communities, unfilled public defender positions have led to increased reliance on court-appointed counsel, placing additional strain on already limited private-practice capacity and increased cost to the county. Understaffed county attorney offices place strain on existing staff and can affect decisions on what cases will be pursued by the office.

Several sessions emphasized the need to revisit statutory frameworks that make it difficult for attorneys to serve multiple counties, negotiate salaries, or structure part-time public service roles alongside private practice. Some sessions perceived the coroner duties associated with county attorney offices as a deterrent for candidates.

Pressure on county budgets means that many county attorney and public defender positions are receiving minimal annual salary increases (1-2%) compared to those in private practice. The Nebraska Association of County Officials salary survey for county attorneys and public defenders is a useful

resource but would be more helpful if it were condensed or summarized in a way to help counties make appropriate comparisons based on size or community and/or staff.

5. Law Schools

Participants expressed concern that Nebraska’s law schools are not producing a sufficient number of graduates interested in rural practice. Noting an increase in out-of-state enrollment, several participants commented that law schools should place greater emphasis on recruiting and supporting students who are likely to remain in Nebraska to practice. Participants also described a perception that law school career services offices are primarily focused on placement with metro-area firms, and that law students increasingly expect to specialize in a particular area of practice rather than pursue the generalist model common in rural communities. Many participants expressed a willingness to engage directly with law students and emphasized that rural practitioners should be included on a broad range of law school panels—not only those specifically focused on promoting rural practice.

There was support for exploring hybrid or part-time educational models—such as the University of Denver Sturm College of Law’s program—as a way to make legal education more accessible to candidates from rural areas who may be unable or unwilling to relocate for a traditional, full-time program. Interest was also expressed in the concept of a satellite campus, like the University of Nebraska Medical Center offers at the University of Nebraska-Kearney.

Participants also supported developing additional opportunities to expose law students to rural practice through clinical programs and externships. Examples cited included Washburn University School of Law’s Third Year Anywhere and Rural Externship Programs, which allow students to immerse themselves in rural practice while earning academic credit and receiving financial support to offset living expenses. The South Dakota Knutson School of Law offers a Tribal Wills Clinic where students spend their spring break consulting with clients and assisting with estate planning on Indian reservations across the state. It also offers a supervised practice experience where students spend a semester working in public sector law offices across the state. Participants viewed these types of programs as effective tools for increasing familiarity with rural practice and strengthening the pipeline of future rural lawyers.

6. Technology and Virtual Hearings

Technology was widely viewed as a double-edged sword. Many participants acknowledged that virtual hearings improve efficiency, reduce travel, and expand geographic coverage, particularly for uncontested matters. At the same time, lawyers raised concerns that virtual hearings may erode professional relationships (with both clients and other lawyers) and make it easier for lawyers from metro-area districts to take work from rural practitioners. Conversely, some rural lawyers noted that they are frequently required to travel to Omaha for routine matters, such as status hearings, that could be more efficiently handled through remote appearances.

There was broad consensus that virtual hearings work well for non-evidentiary matters, and most lawyers and judges reported being comfortable conducting proceedings such as status hearings and bond reviews virtually.

When asked about barriers to virtual hearings, participants reported that some Nebraska judges are unwilling to permit virtual hearings, even for non-evidentiary matters. In addition, participants described recurring connectivity and hardware challenges in certain courthouses. For example, it was reported that there is no cell service in the Frontier County Courthouse and no internet access in the Loup County Courthouse. Technology issues were also routinely reported in Nance County and sometimes Boone County. Participants expressed a perception that challenges in some counties could be mitigated through additional training or technical support for court staff.

Numerous sessions called for uniform statewide rules governing virtual appearances and the use of electronic exhibits. Participants noted inconsistency across districts, with some judges accepting electronic exhibits while others do not, and with varying requirements for filing motions to appear virtually in advance. One participant observed that the primary benefit of requiring an advance motion for a virtual appearance is to determine whether opposing counsel intends to appear in person, noting that some lawyers believe they should also appear in person if opposing counsel does so. Others sought clarity on existing rules. Does "submit to the court" mean the lawyer should send documents to the judge, bailiff or clerk and should opposing counsel be included when submitted?

Lancaster County was frequently cited as a model for replication. In Lancaster County Court, judges maintain a standing "Zoom room," allowing lawyers to appear without advance notice. Participants

perceived this approach as less burdensome for judges and court staff, as it eliminates the need to review motions, distribute links, and manage ad hoc requests. Participants recommended that any uniform rules governing virtual hearings also include guidance on appropriate conduct for both lawyers and self-represented litigants (it was noted that Keith County has a good model where they clearly provide instructions and expectations for appearing virtually).

Participants also discussed whether and how law firms are utilizing artificial intelligence in their practices, and whether AI could enable firms to serve more clients through increased efficiency. A number of participants were hesitant about the use of artificial intelligence, and several reported not using artificial intelligence. Participants noted that, from a cost perspective, artificial intelligence is less accessible to smaller and rural practices. Several participants expressed concern that this disparity could affect rural firms' ability to recruit and retain new lawyers, as smaller practices are less likely to be able to offer the technology tools and resources that recent graduates are increasingly trained to use during law school. Several indicated that this divide needs to be addressed.

7. Judicial Applications and Resources

Participants discussed a decline in the number of applicants for judicial vacancies and noted that recent prior service on a Judicial Nominating Commission had rendered some otherwise qualified candidates ineligible to apply. Participants also questioned why the Judicial Resources Commission (JRC) convenes only quarterly and only after a judicial position has officially been vacated. For example, some asked whether, once a letter of resignation has been received, the JRC could hold a hearing before the position is formally vacant. Alternatively, participants suggested that the JRC could meet more frequently—either in person or through remote technology—to reduce the length of time a jurisdiction is without a permanent judge.

While there was broad appreciation for the willingness of retired judges to provide interim coverage during vacancies, participants noted that reliance on temporary judges can be disruptive to the affected judicial district. This disruption is compounded in situations where a vacancy must be reposted due to an insufficient number of candidates advancing from the nominating process.

8. Regulatory Reform

Across sessions, there was significant interest in regulatory reform. Participants stressed that reforms should maintain professional standards. Participants had questions about whether and how malpractice insurance would be affected if firms employed individuals licensed under any proposed regulatory reforms.

Extending Senior Certified Status

There was support for extending senior certified status for law school graduates who either elect not to take the bar examination immediately after graduation or do not pass the bar exam on their first attempt. Several firms shared examples of having extended employment offers to graduates who did not initially pass the bar exam. Given the ongoing challenges recruiting and retaining lawyers in rural Nebraska, participants viewed extending senior certified status as a practical tool that would allow firms to maintain employment relationships with these graduates while they prepare to take or retake the bar examination.

Bar Admissions

Most sessions included discussion of the NextGen Bar Exam, the concept of adopting a regionalized cut score—intended to reduce the risk of Nebraska losing potential lawyers to neighboring states with lower cut scores—and alternative pathways to bar admission. Across sessions, there was consistent agreement that any reforms related to bar admission should be applied statewide; participants emphasized that there should not be a lower standard to practice law in rural Nebraska.

In discussions of diploma privilege, including diploma privilege paired with a period of supervised practice (often described as an apprenticeship), practitioners noted that the law school curriculum may need to be reevaluated to ensure graduates are adequately prepared for practice. Participants also questioned whether supervised practice requirements could be structured to encourage placements in public interest or rural settings, as a way to expose more graduates to those career paths and help address gaps in rural legal services.

Allied Legal Professionals

Across several rural listening sessions, participants expressed measured but recurring interest in exploring the use of allied legal professionals (ALPs) as one potential tool to improve access to legal

services. Discussions focused on the possibility that ALPs could assist with discrete, high-volume, and uncontested matters, including paternity actions, uncontested divorces, evictions, protection orders, child support enforcement, collections, and uncontested probates. There was also interest in the potential use of ALPs to support court-appointed work, such as assisting with certain guardians ad litem responsibilities. Participants emphasized that any expansion of ALPs should require educational standards, be carefully regulated and require supervision by a licensed Nebraska attorney.

In at least one session, participants discussed pathways for certifying allied legal professionals and emphasized that educational and certification requirements must be accessible to individuals in rural areas. Specifically, participants noted that training should not require individuals to quit their jobs or relocate and suggested that certification programs be offered online or build upon existing rural educational offerings, such as the Chadron Legal Studies program.

Several sessions underscored that ALPs should not be viewed as a replacement for attorneys, but rather as a means of extending legal services capacity under attorney oversight. Participants also emphasized that any ALP framework should be uniform statewide, rather than limited to rural areas.

Allowing Lawyers with Inactive Licenses to do Pro Bono

Participants also discussed the possibility of allowing lawyers with inactive licenses to engage in pro bono work, noting that many states permit this practice. When asked whether there would be interest among retired lawyers, participants suggested that one barrier to participation is the continuing legal education (CLE) requirement associated with active licensure. Participants indicated that interest in pro bono service could increase if CLE obligations for this category of lawyers were reduced and provided at no cost by sponsoring civil legal service providers.

9. Additional Feedback

If you have additional feedback to provide on Nebraska's declining rural lawyer population or would like to become more involved in these efforts, please feel free to contact the Executive Director of the Nebraska State at Lneeley@nebar.com.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback received from its membership, the NSBA's recommendations are below.

Expand the Pipeline of Future Rural Lawyers

- Recommendation 1: Develop a power point presentation for Nebraska lawyers in rural communities to present at local schools about careers in the law, the need for lawyers in rural communities and availability of the RLOP, student loan forgiveness and any other incentives designed to support lawyers practicing in rural communities.
- Recommendation 2: Promote the availability of the Nebraska Lawyers Foundation's LSAT Prep Scholarship for students from underserved rural communities.
- Recommendation 3: Encourage the Nebraska State Bar Foundation to establish mock trial programs in underserved areas of the state and explore other ways to promote law related education into existing civic education opportunities.
- Recommendation 4: Encourage rural colleges and universities to offer a 1 credit Intro to Law course to expose undergraduate students to careers in the law.
- Recommendation 5: Consider how the Nebraska Lawyers Foundation could support the RLOP/KLOP.

Law Schools

- Recommendation 6: Encourage law schools to consider a hybrid option for providing legal education in Nebraska as a means of making a legal education more accessible to rural Nebraska residents.
- Recommendation: 7: Encourage law schools to improve representation of rural lawyers on law school panels.
- Recommendation 8: Encourage law schools to consider clinical models and externship models focused on rural areas of the state.

Support Placement of Summer Interns and Law Clerks in Rural Nebraska

- Recommendation 9: Coordinate and promote summer housing options within state, private and community colleges to provide affordable housing options for summer law clerks in and around those communities.
- Recommendation 10: Explore other opportunities to support housing options within local communities including options that may be available through local Chambers of Commerce and/or County Economic Development Offices.

- Recommendation 11: Support stipends for law students who secure unpaid rural practice positions, particularly in public interest positions.

Support Rural Legal Employers Hiring Efforts

- Recommendation 12: Establish relationships with law schools in neighboring states to better connect candidates, especially those originally from Nebraska, with employment opportunities in rural Nebraska.
- Recommendation 13: Work with the law schools in Nebraska to disseminate resume books of students interested in rural practice by judicial district.
- Recommendation 14: Develop a resource for solo practitioners on the financial considerations for hiring an associate.
- Recommendation 15: Make information, either from the law schools or the NSBA Economic Survey on starting salaries for new associates available so that rural firms are familiar with current salary expectations and educate law firms on the information they should include in job postings to attract potential candidates.
- Recommendation 16: Identify and promote financial incentives currently available through the state, county economic development offices and/or chambers of commerce aimed at recruiting new professionals to rural communities.
- Recommendation 17: Explore the creation of new incentives such as tax incentives, housing support or hiring law clerks (like what was formerly provided through the Intern Nebraska program which recently lost funding).
- Recommendation 18: Examine ways to promote job opportunities to lawyers with several years of practice who may be interested in relocating to a rural area.

Protect and Expand Student Loan Forgiveness

- Recommendation 19: In light of LB 935 (2026), which increased the number of lawyers eligible for student loan repayment assistance by increasing the current population threshold for an underserved rural area (15,000 residents), promote legislation that increases the type and amount of funding available for law student loan repayment.

- Recommendation 20: Consider recommending that the Commission on Public Advocacy amend its Loan Repayment Assistance Fund Rules to provide a preference for loan forgiveness for lawyers who take court appointments or provide family law representation.
- Recommendation 21: Advocate for continuation of the federal Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program as an important tool for recruiting public interest lawyers to rural areas of the state.

Provide Support for Lawyers Taking Over or Establishing New Firms in Rural Nebraska

- Recommendation 22: Develop a Rural Law Firm Legal Incubator program to provide resources, mentors and training to lawyers taking over or establishing new firms in rural Nebraska.
- Recommendation 23: Establish a mechanism to connect lawyers who would like to transition out of practice with lawyers who may be interested in taking over an existing practice.
- Recommendation 24: Identify and promote financial incentives currently available through the state, county economic development offices and/or chambers of commerce aimed at supporting new law firms or satellite offices.
- Recommendation 25: Explore new financial incentives that can be provided to support new firms or the addition of satellite offices in rural Nebraska.

Fill/Support Public Service Roles in Rural Nebraska.

- Recommendation 26: Work with stakeholders to address the large number of vacancies for county attorney and public defender vacancies by supporting legislation that allows counties more flexibility to improve fair and equitable compensation and benefits for county attorney and public defender positions.
- Recommendation 27: Advocate for adequate court appointed counsel rates and clarity in rules related to billing (e.g., compensation of windshield time, mileage and paralegal time).

- Recommendation 28: The NSBA should improve availability of CLE offerings that qualify for GAL credit.
- Recommendation 29: Ask the Nebraska Supreme Court to reexamine the number and type of CLE hours required for Guardians ad Litem in Nebraska.
- Recommendation 30: Ensure adequate funding for the Commission on Public Advocacy to continue its work in rural Nebraska.
- Recommendation 31: Support funding for civil legal service organizations.

Expand Access to Legal Services through Technology

- Recommendation 32: Provide appropriate expanded statutory authority for virtual hearings and legal proceedings;
- Recommendation 33: Propose uniform rules/procedures related to requesting and conducting virtual hearings and legal proceedings;
- Recommendation 34: Provide training for lawyers and judges regarding the use of technology for conducting virtual hearings, legal proceedings and confidential client consultations; and
- Recommendation 35: Exploring the expanded use of technology, including artificial intelligence, to assist self-represented litigants with successfully completing court forms.

Regulatory Reforms

- Concept 1: Study the extent to which a regionalized/uniform cut score for the bar exam would assist Nebraska employers with attracting applicants from neighboring states and prevent losing potential applicants to neighboring states with varying cut scores;
- ⊖ Concept 2: Explore alternate pathways to bar admission.
- Concept 3: Develop a pilot proposal to create a licensed and regulated category of Allied Legal Professionals in Nebraska who would be authorized to provide limited legal services in designated areas of the law.
- Concept 4: Explore rule changes that would allow lawyers with inactive law licenses to do pro bono under the supervision of a qualified civil legal services organization.

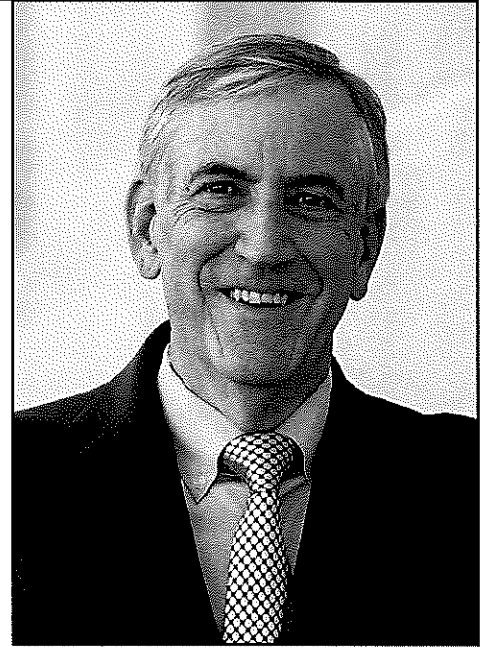
- Concept 5: Explore alternatives for the provision of GAL services.
- Concept 6: Propose rule changes that would extend senior certified status to 12 months following graduation.

**Active members of the bar (including active judges) in
each of the 12 judicial districts**

District 1:	108
District 2:	521
District 3:	1,250
District 4:	2,697
District 5:	182
District 6:	105
District 7:	82
District 8:	63
District 9:	169
District 10:	75
District 11:	139
District 12:	97

Total: 5,488

The Shrinking Judicial Applicant Pool



Hon. John M. Gerrard

A vigorous and engaged practicing bar and a high quality bench are crucial to upholding this state's rule of law and fostering the public's trust and confidence in our system of laws. And a top quality bench requires judicial applicants with a high degree of integrity, impartiality, and competence. The quality of the judiciary is a cornerstone of a healthy democracy, because every judge's decisions affect the fundamental rights and liberties of the citizens they serve.

Over the past 10 years Nebraska has seen a continual decline in the number of lawyers applying for state appellate and trial court judicial vacancies. This trend raises important questions about the factors influencing lawyers' decisions to apply—or not apply—for these vital positions. In partnership with the Nebraska Judicial Branch, the NSBA conducted a survey of its membership to obtain their feedback.

The survey was distributed to all active, licensed lawyers in Nebraska, including judges (5,530), and received 802 responses. Of those 802 respondents, 63.5% (509) reported that they have considered applying for a state appellate or trial court judicial vacancy at some point in their career. Among those who considered applying, 35.15% (155) ultimately applied for a judicial vacancy.

What follows is an initial look at the data. The NSBA and Judicial Branch will take a deeper dive in the next weeks to determine whether changes to the judicial selection process may be helpful.

Motivating and Detering Factors for Lawyers that have Considered Applying

Respondents were asked to identify the factors that influenced their decision to apply and indicate whether each factor had a positive, neutral, or negative impact. The most common positive motivators for applying were: personal fulfillment from serving as a judge (65.12%), level of experience at the time of the vacancy (56.95%) and state benefits and retirement compared to their current position (42.92%). (See Table 1.) These findings suggest that the majority of respondents believe a career as a judge would be personally rewarding, that the lawyers who consider applying felt that they had the experience for the position, and that the Nebraska Judicial Branch provides competitive benefits and retirement.

The most frequently cited deterrents were, "The level of political involvement in the application process" (78.27%), "Whether my political party was the same as the Governor's" (58.15%), "Seeing Judicial Nominating Commissions where qualified candidates did not make it out of Committee" (57.96%), "How it would be perceived by my colleagues or clients if the Judicial Nomination Commission does not find me sufficiently qualified" (40.0%), and "My familiarity with the appointment process" (29.27%). (See Table 2.)



Motivating or Detering Factors for Those Who Have Not Previously Considered Applying for a Judicial Vacancy

For respondents who had not previously considered applying for a judicial vacancy, the survey asked which factors might influence their decision. This group generally expressed less strongly held views, as reflected in the higher percentage of neutral responses across many factors. Overall, their responses were similar to those of respondents who had previously considered applying.

The most common positive motivators were similar to those who had considered a judgeship: "Personal fulfillment from serving as a judge" (37.3%), "State benefits and retirement compared to my current position" (35.91%), and "My ability to earn full retirement benefits (20-year vesting schedule) compared to my current role" (30.59%). (See Table 3.)

The most frequently cited deterrents for future applications are: "The level of political involvement in the application process" (71.28%), "Whether my political party was the same as the Governor's" (60.4%), "Seeing Judicial Nominating

Commissions where qualified candidates did not make it out of Committee" (51.36%), "the need to relocate" (45.41%), "I practice in an area that is not typically selected for judgeships" (42.86%), and "How it would be perceived by my colleagues or clients if the Judicial Nomination Commission does not find me sufficiently qualified" (41.82%). (See Table 4.)

Themes From Open-Ended Responses

The survey also asked respondents for their opinion on what deters more applicants from applying for a judicial vacancy and for their recommendations on how to increase the number of applicants.

Political Affiliation

There is a widely held perception that candidates who do not share the Governor's political party are unlikely to be appointed as judges in Nebraska. Many respondents indicated that this belief is a significant deterrent to applying.

Salary, Benefits and Support

Respondents frequently recommended improving judicial compensation. Many noted that current salary levels may attract candidates committed to public service but are less competitive for those coming from private practice.

Table 1: Motivating Factors for Those Who Have Considered Applying

	Positive Impact	Neutral	Negative Impact	Don't Know	Total
Personal fulfillment from serving as a judge compared to my current or previous role	65.12%	19.82%	7.28%	7.73%	453
My level of experience at the time of the judicial vacancy	56.95%	18.76%	18.32%	5.96%	173
State benefits and retirement compared to my current position	42.92%	31.19%	7.30%	18.58%	452

Table 2: Detering Factors for Those Who Have Considered Applying

	Positive Impact	Neutral	Negative Impact	Don't Know	Total
The level of political involvement in the application process	2.88%	11.09%	78.27%	7.76%	451
Whether my political party was the same as the Governor's	10.79%	19.82%	58.15%	11.23%	454
Seeing Judicial Nominating Commissions where qualified candidates did not make it out of Committee	2.43%	19.03%	57.96%	20.58%	452
How it would be perceived by my colleagues or clients if the Judicial Nomination Commission does not find me sufficiently qualified	1.11%	29.78%	40.00%	29.11%	450
My familiarity with the appointment process	10.67%	33.33%	29.27%	27.94%	450

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Additionally, respondents suggested that the Judicial Branch should clearly publicize salary details, benefits (such as retirement and health insurance), and onboarding/training opportunities in job announcements to better inform potential applicants.

Several respondents also expressed concern that the current 20-year vesting schedule for retirement discourages lawyers over the age of 45 from applying. Many recommended revisiting the vesting schedule to encourage more experienced attorneys to consider judicial positions.

Qualified Candidates' Names Not Being Forwarded to the Governor

When lawyers who are perceived as being qualified by the practicing bar are not forwarded to the Governor by the Judicial Nominating Commission, it erodes trust in the process and discourages other candidates from applying. Respondents noted variability in how commissions interpret their role—whether to advance all qualified candidates, or only those deemed the highest quality.

Several respondents suggested that clarifying the role of Judicial Nominating Commissions and establishing more objective criteria for determining qualifications could improve consistency and confidence in the process.

Communications about Vacancies and the Application Process

Respondents recommended that notices of open judicial vacancies be published more prominently and more frequently, and some suggested extending the application timeline. Additionally, respondents emphasized the need for improved communication and education about the judicial nominating and application process, including offering CLEs on the topic.

To that end, the NSBA is now offering a CLE titled *Applying for a Judicial Vacancy*, available through the NSBA's OnDemand CLE platform. The seminar materials include valuable feedback from the Governor's Office regarding the Governor's role in the process.



Table 3: Motivating Factors for Those Who Have Not Previously Considered Applying

	Positive Impact	Neutral	Negative Impact	Don't Know	Total
Personal fulfillment from serving as a judge compared to my current or previous role	37.27%	38.64%	17.27%	6.82%	220
State benefits and retirement compared to my current position	35.91%	44.00%	10.00%	9.09%	220
My ability to earn full retirement benefits (20-year vesting schedule) compared to my current role)	30.59%	43.38%	18.26%	7.76%	219

Table 4: Detering Factors for Those Who Have Not Previously Considered Applying

	Positive Impact	Neutral	Negative Impact	Don't Know	Total
The level of political involvement in the application process	1.82%	20.45%	71.28%	5.91%	220
Whether my political party was the same as the Governor's	6.36%	27.27%	60.45%	5.91%	220
Seeing Judicial Nominating Commissions where qualified candidates did not make it out of Committee	1.82%	32.27%	51.36%	14.55%	220
The need to relocate	1.83%	44.95%	45.41%	7.80%	218
I practice in an area that is not typically selected for judgeships	10.71%	38.84%	42.86%	7.59%	224
How it would be perceived by my colleagues or clients if the Judicial Nomination Commission does not find me sufficiently qualified	0.91%	48.48%	41.82%	9.09%	220

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Residency Requirement

Some respondents expressed a desire for greater flexibility in the residency requirement, suggesting that eligibility could extend to individuals living in an adjacent district or within a specified distance from the home court. As one respondent noted, *"There are judges who live in neighboring districts and would have a shorter commute than if they relocated within their own judicial district."*

Alignment of Practice Areas


There is a widely held perception that historically, governors prefer to appoint prosecutors, and many respondents indicated that this belief significantly discourages lawyers from other practice areas from applying. In point of fact, a number of private practice lawyers have recently been appointed to the bench by the governor; nonetheless, the perception remains.

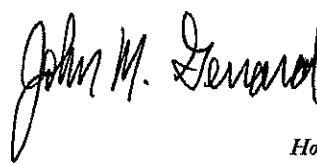
Relatedly, numerous respondents expressed concern about lawyers with exclusively criminal court experience being appointed to judicial vacancies where more than 70% of the docket consists of domestic relations cases. To address this, several respondents recommended creating specialized dockets or dedicated family court positions. It is thought that these changes may help attract highly qualified family law practitioners and ensure better alignment between judicial experience and case types.

Next Steps

The survey results provide valuable insight into the factors that influence whether Nebraska lawyers apply for judicial vacancies, as well as numerous recommendations for improving the judicial application process.

In the coming months, the NSBA will work with the Judicial Branch to review the data and membership feedback and identify areas for meaningful improvement. I extend my sincere thanks to all who took the time to respond and share their perspectives. Your input is critical to ensuring that Nebraska maintains a fair, transparent, and effective judicial selection process—one that attracts highly qualified candidates and upholds the integrity of our judiciary.

Finally, I'll add a personal note, as a veteran of the judicial appointment process—there's no doubt that applying for a judicial vacancy can be intimidating and even exasperating. But so too is running for elective office, or serving in the executive or legislative branch. Government of every kind is messy and often frustrating—but very little in the practice of law is as satisfying as doing an important job well. And the perception that certain experience or political affiliation is preferred should not become self-fulfilling prophecy. Even simply applying for a position—*participating* in the system—changes the conversation and raises the bar for everyone. So, I encourage *all* well-qualified lawyers to seriously consider a judicial career. If you think this is your calling, don't be afraid to take the leap. The payoff can be extremely rewarding to both you and the State of Nebraska. 



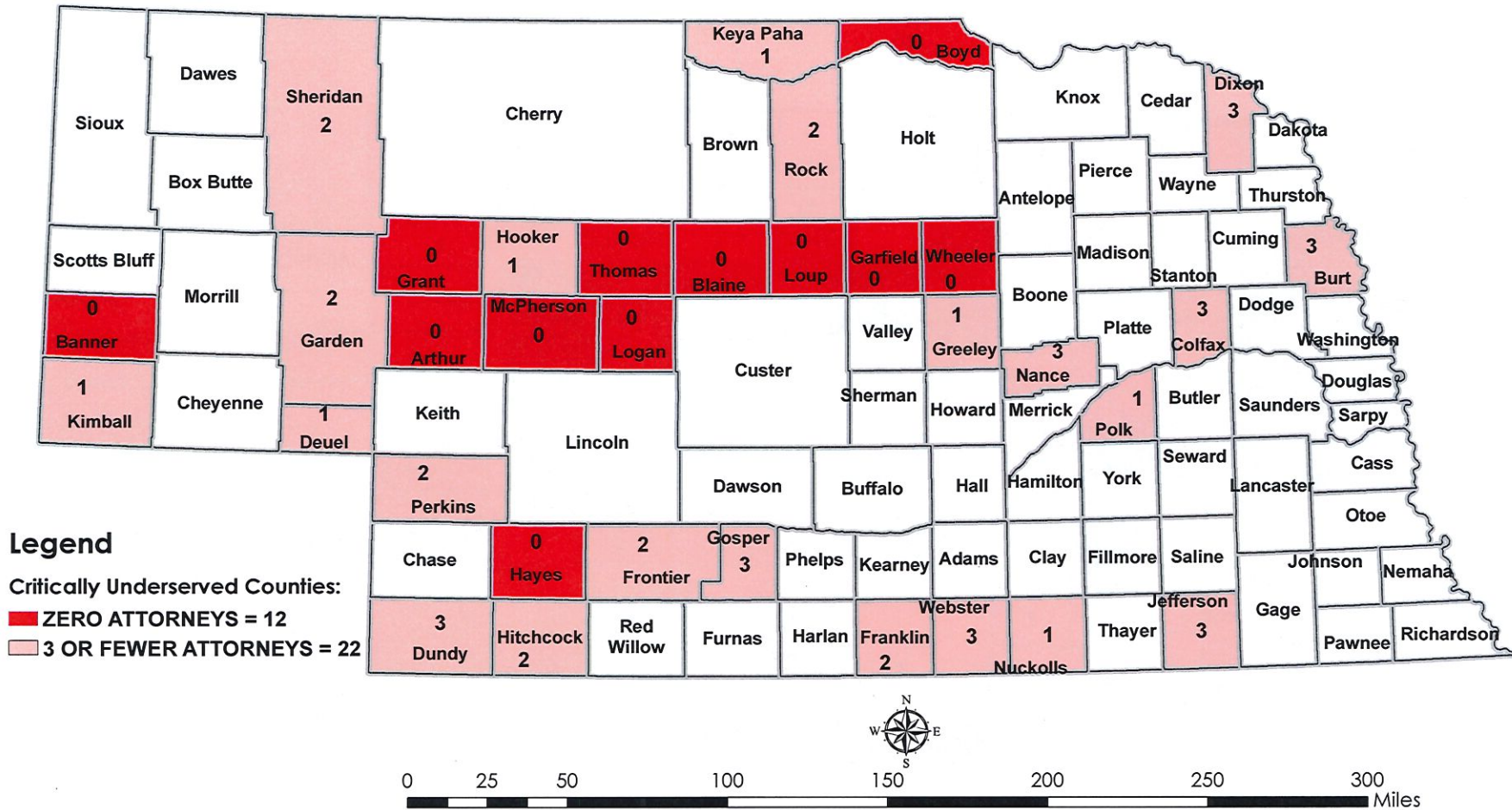
Hon. John M. Gerrard, President
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2026 Judicial Evaluation Poll

The Nebraska State Bar Association's 2026 Judicial Evaluation Poll will be conducted as an online survey. The poll has been recently updated and is designed to gather lawyers' feedback on key qualities expected of judges, including judicial competence, impartiality, clarity of communication, judicial temperament, and administrative capacity. Your participation is essential. Thoughtful responses provide meaningful feedback to judges, offer valuable information to voters, and help strengthen the judicial system. Aggregate results will also guide future training and resources available to the judiciary. Eligible participants will receive an email with a secure survey link on April 7, 2026. The deadline to complete the survey is May 16, 2026.

Attorneys per County in Nebraska

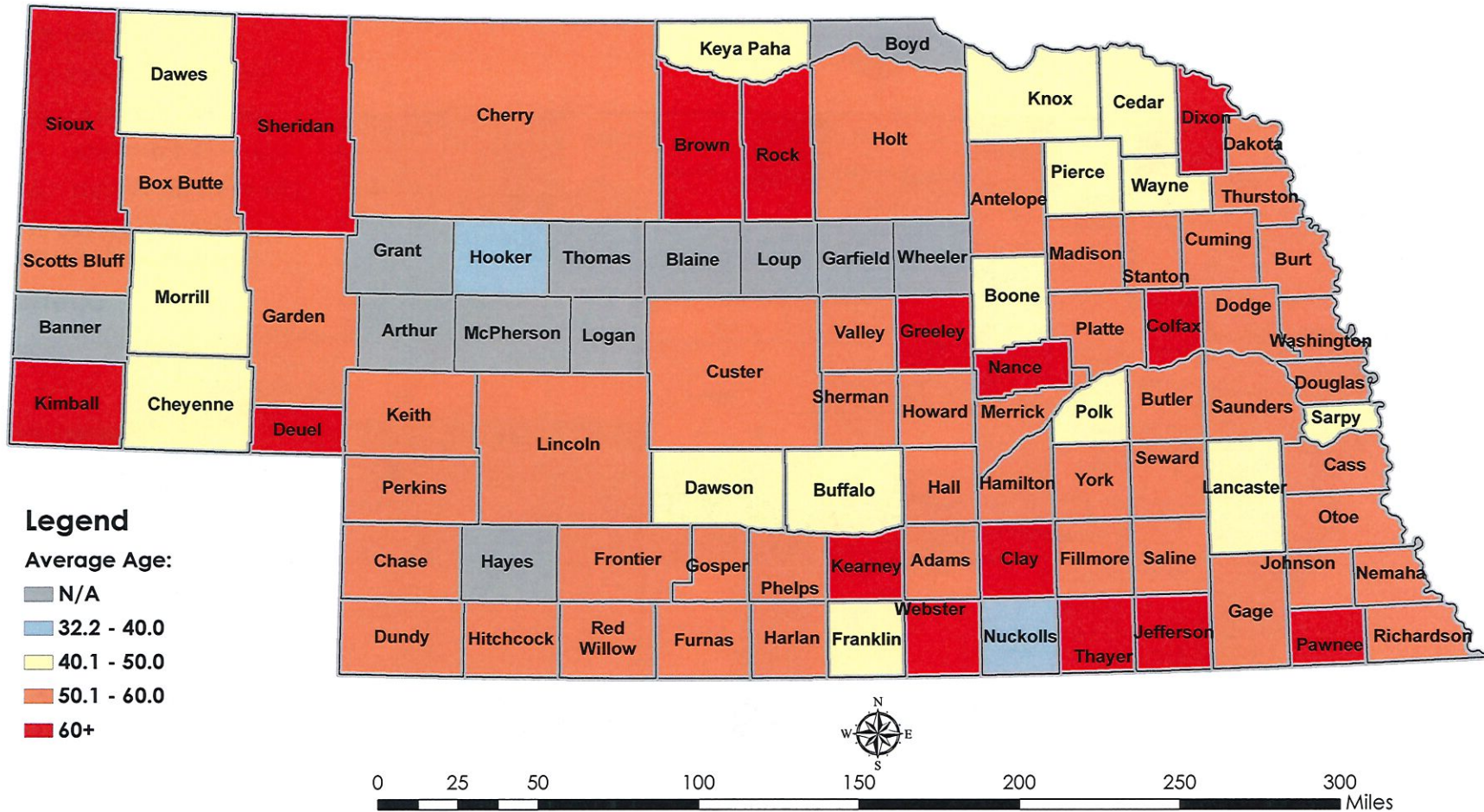
Counties with Zero and Counties with Three or Fewer Attorneys



Note: These figures include lawyers with active law licenses. Judges are not included.

NEBRASKA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
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Average Age of Attorneys by County



Note: These figures include lawyers with active law licenses. Judges are not included.

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