



Annual Report 2023

from District 10

Honorable Rachel L. Pickering

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**Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota**

Keeping with the theme of NAWJ's mission of "promoting the judicial role of protecting the rights of individuals under the rule of law through strong, committed, diverse judicial leadership; fairness and equality in the courts; and equal access to justice," this district will work towards organizing and presenting the rewarding NAWJ programs. Overall, the goal is to successfully implement these programs throughout District 10.

**Kansas:**

Work is underway to begin a shorten version of a NAWJ flagship project, the *Color of Justice*. Again, we are looking into the best means of showcasing this program to many here in Kansas. There will be an outreach program to western Kansas in the next few weeks, which can provide the necessary planning framework for presenting this project in spring or fall 2024.

As noted in an earlier report, work will begin soon on presenting the *Informed Voter Project*. Currently, we are still at the early planning stages.

On August 2, 2023, Governor Kelly appointed Sarah E. Stewart to serve as a district judge in the Sixth Judicial District. At the time of her appointment, Judge Stewart has served as City Prosecutor for the City of Lenexa. She is active in the legal community with memberships in the Kansas Bar Association, Kansas Women Attorneys Association, Miami County Bar Association, Kansas County & District Attorney Association, and the Johnson County Bar Association.

## Minnesota:

On August 23, 2023, Governor Walz announced the appointment of Justice Natalie Hudson as Chief Justice. Justice Hudson, as noted by the Governor's office, fills the vacancy that will occur with the October 2023 retirement of Chief Justice Lorie Gildea. Justice Hudson has many accomplishments, as noted in the Governor's press release:

"Justice Natalie Hudson is an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court, having been appointed to this position in October 2015 by Governor Mark Dayton. Hudson previously served as a judge on the Minnesota Court of Appeals for thirteen years. She also practiced criminal appellate law with the Office of the Minnesota Attorney General for eight years and served as the St. Paul city attorney. Early in her career, she represented indigent clients as a staff attorney with Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services.

Hudson served as a member of the original Minnesota Supreme Court Racial Bias Task Force from 1991-1993 and later served on the task force's implementation committee. Her other community involvement includes serving on the advisory board for Minnesota Women Lawyers and the advisory board for the University of Minnesota Law School. She also participated on the Warren E. Burger Inn of Court for many years. She is a member of the Judicial Division of the American Bar Association, the Minnesota State Bar Association, and the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers. Hudson earned her B.A. from Arizona State University and her J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School."

Additionally, on August 17, 2023, Governor Walz announced the appointment of Kathryn Hipp Carlson as a judge on the Minnesota Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals. The press release provides:

Kathryn Hipp Carlson is an attorney at Hipp Carlson, PLLC, where she has practiced exclusively in workers' compensation since 1993. She was previously an attorney at Gilmore, Aafedt, Forde, Anderson & Gary. Throughout her career, Carlson has advised and advocated for injured workers, as well as employers and insurers, at all levels of the workers' compensation system. She also represents several medical insurers in intervention matters and serves as a mediator in workers' compensation disputes. Carlson is a frequent speaker at continuing legal education seminars on workers' compensation topics. She has also served on the board of directors for Minnesota Youth Athletic Services. Carlson earned her B.A. and J.D. from the University of Minnesota.

On July 19, 2023, Governor Walz announced the appointment of Nicole Hopps as District Court Judge in the Sixth Judicial District. As noted by the Governor's press release:

"Nicole Hopps is the managing attorney for the Sixth Judicial District Public Defender's Office in Duluth. In this role, she supervises attorneys and support staff serving indigent clients, including in the areas of rehabilitative justice, diversion, and welfare programs. She previously served in the Sixth Judicial District as an assistant public defender. Hopps's community involvement includes volunteering with the Carlton County Community Outreach Program, the South St. Louis County Mental and Behavioral Health courts, and the Indian Child Welfare Act Court team. She also serves on the board of directors of Churches United in Ministry (CHUM), which is an organization that serves low-income, homeless, hungry, isolated, or otherwise marginalized community members in Duluth. She earned her B.A. from the University of Minnesota Duluth and her J.D. from the University of North Dakota School of Law."

### **Nebraska:**

A NAWJ project that can be implemented this coming law school year is MentorJet. This national NAWJ project may be facilitated through Nebraska's two law schools, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Creighton University, located in Omaha. To get this underway, the district will need to begin planning these events for a possible late fall or spring date. If properly executed, this could not only benefit many law students, but serve as the springboard for future NAWJ programs.

### **North Dakota:**

Like other states in this district, a NAWJ project that can be implemented this coming academic year is MentorJet. This district will need to work on determining the best venue for facilitating this national NAWJ project.

The last report detailed the creation of three new judicial positions through the enactment of HB 1002. As noted, there were three new openings: a new Northeast Central Judicial District judgeship opening and two new judgeship openings in the East Central Judicial District.

On July 10, 2023, Governor Doug Burgum announced his appointment of Kristi Venhuizen to the newly created judgeships in the Northeast Central Judicial District. Her chambers will be in Grand Forks.

The press release provides the following background information:

"Venhuizen has practiced law for 25 years and currently is a partner in the law firm of Kalash & Pettit Attorneys at Law. Since 1999, she has served as the Grand Forks city prosecutor, processing cases through Grand Forks Municipal Court, jury trials in Grand Forks District Court, appeals to the North Dakota Supreme Court and administrative hearings held through the North Dakota Department of Transportation's Drivers License and Safety Division. In private practice, she has represented clients in family law matters, estate planning, guardianships and conservatorships, probate law, domestic violence protection orders and real estate matters.

Venhuizen grew up in Grand Forks, where she graduated from Red River High School. She earned her bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks and her law degree from Washburn University School of Law in Topeka, Kan., in May 1998.

Venhuizen has served as the supervising attorney for the Community Violence Intervention Center in Grand Forks since 2006 and as a Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor for the state of North Dakota since 2011. She has taught criminal law and criminal procedure in the Criminal Justice Department at UND since 2007. She is a member of the State Bar Association of North Dakota, having served as its president in 2011-2012, and has also served on the boards of the United Way of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks & Area, Agassiz Enterprises, Grand Forks Foundation for Education, Crime Stoppers and the North Dakota Ballet Co."

### **South Dakota**

As last reported, South Dakota has nine reservations with active tribal courts. This district will work to begin discussing future NAWJ presentations and/or spotlight those presiding as tribal judges. We will also need to look at the possibility of presenting a NAWJ programs such as MentorJet, to benefit the South Dakota law students.