



Midyear 2022  
Report from District 10  
Honorable Rachel L. Pickering

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

**Kansas:**

October

In October 2021, the Kansas Supreme Court District appointed Judge Jennifer Brunetti to the Access to Justice Committee. District Judge Jennifer Brunetti has served as a judge since 2018 and is in the 11th Judicial District.

November

In Kansas, each of the 31 judicial districts has a chief judge who has general control over district case assignments and supervisory authority over the administrative and clerical functions of the court. The following have been appointed or reappointed as chief judge:

- Judge Amy Harth was reappointed to the 6th Judicial District. Judge Harth has served as a district judge since 2004 and chief judge since 2015.
- Judge Laura Lewis was reappointed in the 16th Judicial District. She has served as a district court judge since 2019 and chief judge since 2020.
- Judge Patricia Macke Dick was reappointed in the 27th Judicial District. She has served as a district judge since 1989 and chief judge since 2007.
- Judge Rene Young was reappointed in the 28th Judicial District. She has served as a district judge since 2006 and chief judge since 2015.

Judge Rachel Pickering was invited by the ABA Foundation to become an ABA Fellow. She became an ABA Fellow in November 2021.

The Kansas Supreme Court appointed District Judge Constance Alvey, 29th Judicial District to the Kansas Child Support Guidelines Advisory Committee.

## December

Chief Justice Marla Luckert, Kansas Supreme Court, was awarded the Phil Lewis Medal of Distinction. The Phil Lewis Medal of Distinction is reserved for individuals or organizations in Kansas who have performed outstanding and conspicuous service at the state, national, or international level in administration of justice, science, the arts, government, philosophy, law, or any other field offering relief or enrichment to others. Chief Justice Luckert stated, “I am extremely honored to receive the Phil Lewis Medal of Distinction and am humbled to join the list of past recipients, many of whom supported and encouraged me during my professional journey. I am deeply grateful for the support the Kansas Bar Association and its members have provided to me, the legal profession, and the Kansas judicial branch as we work together to improve our profession.”

Judge Patricia Macke Dick, chief judge of the 27th Judicial District, received the Pillars of Community Award. This Pillars of Community Award is given to a Kansas lawyer, judge, and Kansas Bar Association member with a minimum of 10 years of active nonspecialized, general legal practice in a predominately low-density population area of Kansas. Recipients have substantial practice in small or solo law firms or local government service. She stated, “I am honored to be recognized by the Kansas Bar Association for my commitment to my community and the state of Kansas. I appreciate the efforts of all Kansas lawyers in making our state a great place to live and practice.”

Retired Justice Carol Beier received the Christel Marquardt Trailblazer Award, which recognizes exceptional Kansas Bar Association members who break new ground, shatter glass ceilings, or pave new paths for others to follow. Justice Beier stated, “Judge Christel Marquardt was a good friend and mentor of mine, and I am honored and humbled to be selected for the Kansas Bar Association award created to recognize her pioneering leadership. In fact, if it were not for Christel’s telephone call to me in the fall of 1999 urging me to submit my name for consideration, I may have never ended up on the bench. Christel’s call typifies the boost that all of us can use in our lives and in our careers, and I’m happy that I have been in a position to provide help to young lawyers who have worked with and for me over the years.”

Chief Judge Karen Arnold-Burger, Kansas Court of Appeals, received the Outstanding Service Award, which recognizes those in the legal profession for services that advance the administration of justice. This award recognized Chief Judge Arnold-Burger’s numerous presentations to the legal and public community groups across the state and her work on the Supreme Court Ad Hoc Pretrial Justice Task Force. Chief Judge Arnold-Burger stated, “It is an incredible honor to be recognized for my contributions to continuing legal and judicial education. I am proud to be a Kansas lawyer, and to be able to help my fellow lawyers.”

Judge Kim Cudney was elected president of the Kansas District Judges Association. She is chief judge of the 12th Judicial District. Judge Cudney stated, “I am honored to be selected by my colleagues to serve in a leadership role of the Kansas District Judges Association. The KDJA strives to better the judicial community statewide by taking positive steps toward improving the administration of justice and addressing issues that arise at the trial-court level. I

look forward to meeting with familiar and new peers, listening to their ideas and concerns, and addressing those issues as an organization.”

Judge Brenda Cameron was elected secretary of the Kansas District Judges Association. She serves in the Tenth Judicial District.

Judge Cheryl Rios was elected treasurer of the Kansas District Judges Association. She serves in the Third Judicial District.

District Magistrate Judge Jenifer Ashford was re-elected president of the Kansas District Magistrate Judges Association.

District Judge Kristi Cott was appointed to serve as chief judge of the 25th Judicial District. Judge Cott has served as district court judge since 2021. Judge Cott stated, "I look forward to working with the other judges in the district and I am confident we can increase access to the justice system while giving all parties their fair day in court. I have managed offices in the past and I hope my leadership skills will transfer into the many responsibilities associated with being chief judge.”

### January

On January 11, 2022, Chief Justice Marla Luckert delivered the State of the Kansas Judiciary. Chief Justice Luckert delivered the State of the Judiciary to Governor Kelly and a joint session of the Kansas Senate and House of Representatives.

### February

The Kansas Supreme Court appointed Chief Judge Laura Lewis to the Chief Judges Council, which provides the court with ground-level perspective on issues facing Kansas trial courts. Judge Lewis is chief judge of the 16th Judicial District. She has been a district judge since 2019 and chief judge since 2021.

On February 14, Governor Kelly appointed Jessica Heinen as District Court Judge in the Third Judicial District. The Judicial Investiture is scheduled for Friday, March 25, 2022. Jessica Heinen was a Deputy District Attorney with the Shawnee County District Attorney’s Office. Previously she had worked as a staff attorney for the Kansas Securities Commissioner and assistant city attorney for the City of Topeka.

## **Nebraska:**

### October

In October 2021, the Nebraska County Judges Association appointed Judge C. Jo Peterson from Seward, Nebraska, as their new association president and the Nebraska District Judges Association appointed Judge Leigh Ann Retelsdorf from Omaha, Nebraska as their new president. Each will serve until October 2022. Judges' associations allow courts to network,

problem-solve and share innovations across the state. Their goal is to educate one another on national, state and local issues; and discuss ways to more efficiently function within the Judicial Branch of government. Judge association presidents work closely with the Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court and with the Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation. Association presidents have the power to appoint specialized committees and operate with their elected executive committees.

### November

On November 29, 2021, Governor Pete Ricketts appointed Molly B. Keane of Elkhorn as District Court Judge in the Fourth Judicial District (Douglas County). Keane has worked as a Deputy County Attorney in the Douglas County Attorney's Office since 2005. In that role, she has supervised a team of attorneys in general prosecution of all felony offenses. She has also supervised the Child Victim/Sexual Assault Unit, leading a team of specially trained attorneys in the prosecution of all felony crimes against children and all sexually based offenses. From 2001 to 2004, Keane was an Assistant District Attorney in the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office in Massachusetts. During her career, Keane has gained extensive trial experience having tried over 125 jury trials. Keane holds a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, graduating with the distinction of being a Superior Scholar. She also holds a Juris Doctor from Boston College Law School. She is a member of the Massachusetts Bar Association, Nebraska Bar Association, Omaha Bar Association, and National District Attorneys Association. Keane is also a member of the Nebraska County Attorneys Association and has served on its Board of Directors since 2018. Keane has been honored with the Kids First Award by Project Harmony in recognition of her service to children in the community. She has volunteered with several community organizations and served on many statewide teams such as the Child and Maternal Death Review Team and Nebraska Human Trafficking Taskforce.

On November 29, 2021, Governor Pete Ricketts appointed LeAnne M. Srb of Papillion as District Court Judge in the Fourth Judicial District (Douglas County). Srb has worked as a District Court Referee in Douglas County since 2017. In this capacity, she handles cases related to child support, medical support, and spousal support, as well as State and private contempt matters regarding non-compliance with District Court orders. Srb also worked for Douglas County as an Assistant Public Defender from 1999 to 2017, where she represented persons charged with felony and misdemeanor offenses in Douglas County District Court and County Court. Srb holds a B.A. in Pre-Law from the College of Saint Mary and a Juris Doctor from the Creighton University School of Law. She is a member of the Nebraska State Bar Association and the Omaha State Bar Association.

### December

On December 21, 2021, Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts appointed Tanya Roberts-Connick of North Platte as County Court Judge in the Eleventh Judicial District. Roberts-Connick, 47, has worked in the Lincoln County Attorney's Office since 2000. She served as Deputy County Attorney from 2000 to 2012, with experience in both the child support enforcement division and the criminal division. She has been Lincoln County's Chief Deputy

County Attorney since April 1, 2012. In this capacity, she has represented the State of Nebraska in criminal, juvenile, and Mental Health Board proceedings as well as having responsibility to supervise and train staff. Prior to her time with the Lincoln County Attorney's Office, Roberts-Connick worked for the Nebraska State Patrol as a law clerk from 1998 to 2000. Roberts-Connick holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Nebraska Wesleyan University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Law. She is a member of the Nebraska Bar Association and the Nebraska County Attorneys Association. Since 2017, Roberts-Connick has served on the Nebraska Attorney General's Office Human Trafficking Task Force as Lead for the West Region, composed of 27 counties in Western Nebraska. She has also been a member of Lincoln County's Coordinated Response Team for Domestic Violence, its Sexual Assault Response Team, and its Human Trafficking Task Force.

## **Minnesota:**

**From October 2021 through February 2022, Governor Walz appointed 8 women attorneys to the bench, including an appointment to the Minnesota Court of Appeals.**

### October

In October 2021, Siv Mjanger and Jennifer Stanfield were appointed by Governor Walz as District Court Judges in Minnesota's Tenth Judicial District. The seats will be chambered in Stillwater in Washington County and Anoka in Anoka County.

Governor Walz stated, "Ms. Mjanger is a remarkable lawyer and a longtime leader in Washington County. Her extensive public service as both a prosecutor and public defender gives me full confidence that she will have the wisdom and compassion to be an excellent judge."

As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Mjanger is the Criminal Division Chief at the Washington County Attorney's Office. In addition to her management responsibilities, she advises the County Attorney on the development and execution of internal and external policies. She is the lead sexual assault and vulnerable adult prosecutor in Washington County. Ms. Mjanger was previously an Assistant Washington County Attorney, and she has also practiced in the areas of family law and criminal defense. Ms. Mjanger began her career as an Assistant Hennepin County Public Defender. She serves on the Washington County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Steering Team and the Vulnerable Adult Multidisciplinary Team. Ms. Mjanger is an advocate for criminal justice reform, including bail reform, diversion reform, and additional support for offenders with substance abuse disorder to curtail recidivism. Ms. Mjanger earned her B.A. from the University of Minnesota and J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law."

Governor Walz also stated, "I am also honored to appoint Ms. Stanfield to the Tenth Judicial District bench. Ms. Stanfield is a dedicated public servant and devoted contributor to her community. Her experience as a child support magistrate and a longtime assistant county attorney—as well as her human rights advocacy work—have prepared her well to serve the people of Anoka County with distinction."

As stated in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Stanfield is a Child Support Magistrate in the Tenth Judicial District. She previously worked as a Senior Assistant Carver County Attorney,

where she worked in the areas of child support, child protection, maltreatment, commitments, and criminal law. Ms. Stanfield was also a Staff Attorney with the Minnesota State Court Administrator's office. She has worked for the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, and she has volunteered for women's legal aid programs in Ethiopia. Ms. Stanfield has been a member of the Minnesota Department of Human Services Advisory Committee, the Minnesota County Attorney's Association, and the Minnesota Family Support and Recovery Council. She is the co-creator of the nationally recognized Carver County program Jobs Not Jail. Ms. Stanfield earned her B.A. and J.D. from Hamline University."

## November

In November 2021, Sarah Wheelock was appointed by Governor Walz to the Minnesota Court of Appeals. Sarah Wheelock is the first Native American judge to sit on the Minnesota Court of Appeals.

Governor Walz stated, "It is my honor to appoint Sarah Wheelock to the Minnesota Court of Appeals. In her time serving as legal counsel for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and tribes across the nation, Ms. Wheelock has repeatedly shown that she is a dedicated public servant committed to advancing the common good. She is well prepared to join the Court of Appeals." As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Wheelock is legal counsel for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community in Prior Lake. She previously worked as an Adjunct Professor at Mitchell Hamline College of Law and as an Appellate Judge for the White Earth Band of Chippewa Court of Appeals. Her experience includes litigation in tribal, federal, and state courts, as well as economic development and finance work. Ms. Wheelock is a member of the Meskwaki Nation (federally recognized as the Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa). She is a member and past Vice President of the Minnesota American Indian Bar Association, member of the National Native American Bar Association, and member of the Federal Bar Association. She previously served as a member of the Minnesota Commission on Judicial Selection. Her community involvement includes serving as a director on the board for the Division of Indian Work, as an assistant director of Twin Cities Native Lacrosse, and as the chair of the American Indian Parent Action Committee for the Prior Lake-Savage Area School District. Ms. Wheelock earned her B.A. and J.D. from the University of Iowa."

## December

In December 2021, Helen Brosnahan and Kari Willis were appointed by Governor Walz as District Court Judges in Minnesota's Tenth Judicial District. The seats will be chambered in Stillwater in Washington County and Buffalo in Wright County.

Governor Walz stated, "Ms. Brosnahan will be an excellent addition to the Tenth Judicial District. "She has a wealth of life and legal experience that will make her a compassionate and effective judge in Washington County." As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Brosnahan is an Assistant Dakota County Attorney in the Civil Division, where she handles matters including litigation, contracts, civil asset forfeiture, and water management. Previously, Ms. Brosnahan was an Assistant Dakota County Attorney in the Criminal Division, where she prosecuted adult criminal cases. Ms. Brosnahan has been recognized as a leader for her work with Dakota County's initiative to champion inclusion, diversity, and equity, and she serves on

the Dakota County Attorney's Office's Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Alliance. Before joining Dakota County, Ms. Brosnahan was an attorney at LeVander, Gillen & Miller, P.A., an Assistant Olmsted County Attorney, and a law clerk for the Honorable Robert F. Carolan. Ms. Brosnahan also served on the Minnesota Supreme Court Advisory Committee on the Rules of Criminal Procedure. She has been active with Minnesota Women Lawyers, where she has served in various leadership roles. Ms. Brosnahan has been a judge for the William McGee National Civil Rights Moot Court Competition and the Minnesota State Bar Association Moot Court Competition. Ms. Brosnahan earned her B.A. from Smith College and her J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School."

Governor Walz stated, "I am proud to appoint Ms. Willis to serve on the Wright County bench. She has a long legal career serving the people of Wright County, and I am confident that this familiarity and commitment to her community will only grow stronger as a District Court judge." As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Willis is an Assistant County Attorney with the Wright County Attorney's Office, where she primarily represents the human services agency in child protection matters. She previously worked in the areas of juvenile delinquency and adult criminal prosecution. Prior to joining the Wright County Attorney's Office, Ms. Willis was a law clerk for the Honorable Kim Johnson in Wright County in the Tenth Judicial District. Ms. Willis is an active participant in The Turn - Wright County Adult Drug Court Program. Her community involvement includes engaging with community youth sports and volunteering as a mock trial judge with the Minnesota State Bar Association. Ms. Willis serves on the Wright County Safe Schools committee, Community Child Safety Team, Back-to-School Program, and Children's Justice Initiative. She also administers the Wright County Attorney's Office truancy program. Ms. Willis earned her B.A. from the University of Minnesota Duluth and her J.D. from the Hamline School of Law."

## January

In January 2022, Christy Hormann was appointed by Governor Walz as District Court Judge in Minnesota's Third Judicial District. Governor Walz stated, "I am proud to appoint Ms. Hormann to the Freeborn County bench. Her work on the Third Judicial District Veteran's Treatment Court and her dedication to helping those suffering from mental health and substance abuse issues give me confidence that she will lead with compassion and strive for equitable outcomes for all those who appear before her."

As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Hormann is the Chief Deputy Steele County Attorney. She was previously an Assistant Ramsey County Attorney in the criminal division. Ms. Hormann also serves on the Third Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court and the Steele County Community Corrections Advisory Board. Her community involvement includes serving on the board of directors for the Crisis Resource Center and the Steele County Safety Camp. She is also a member of the Promoting Peace Planning Committee and a mock trial judge with the Minnesota State High School League. Ms. Hormann earned her B.A. from the University of St. Thomas and her J.D. from the William Mitchell College of Law."

## February

In February 2022, Amber Brennan was appointed by Governor Walz as District Court Judges in Minnesota's Fourth Judicial District. Her seat is chambered in Minneapolis in Hennepin County. Governor Walz stated, "Ms. Brennan is an extraordinary attorney whose breadth of experience includes service in the United States Attorney's Office as well as the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis. Ms. Brennan's unique background will provide her with a holistic and compassionate view of the justice system that will serve her well on the bench."

As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Brennan is Chief of the Firearms and Violent Crime section of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota. Ms. Brennan is also an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School, where she teaches litigation skills. Previously, Ms. Brennan served as an Assistant Hennepin County attorney and as a Minnesota Assistant Attorney General. She has also served as an attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis. Ms. Brennan co-founded a task force to recruit and train volunteer lawyers to represent victims of predatory lending and foreclosure rescue scams. Ms. Brennan earned her B.A. from San Diego State University and J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School."

Additionally, in February 2022, Stacey Sorensen was appointed by Governor Walz as District Court Judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District. Governor Walz stated, "I am excited to appoint Ms. Sorensen to serve on the First Judicial District bench. Ms. Sorensen is a committed member of her community with 15 years of experience as a civil litigator. I know Ms. Sorensen will work hard to create equitable outcomes for everyone who comes before her."

As noted in the Governor's press release: "Ms. Sorensen is an attorney for Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. Her legal practice includes personal injury, premises liability, commercial liability, workers compensation, and complex insurance litigation. Ms. Sorensen also serves as an adjunct professor in Mitchell Hamline School of Law's trial advocacy program, and she is a Minnesota State Bar Association Certified Civil Trial Specialist. She has served as an arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association and as a volunteer faculty member for the National Institute for Trial Advocacy. Ms. Sorensen coaches high school mock trial and serves on the Board of Directors for the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented (MCGT), as well as the Prior Lake chapter of MCGT. Ms. Sorensen earned her B.A. from Macalester College and J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law."

Currently, there are no reports from North Dakota or South Dakota.