



Face coverings required in court facilities.

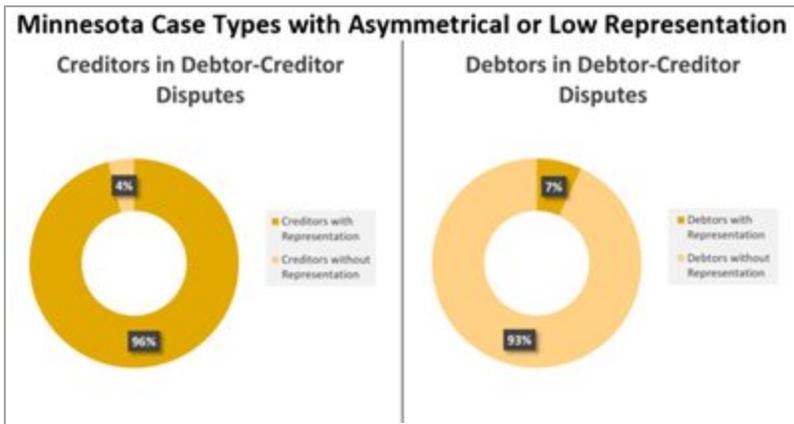
The response to COVID-19 has impacted access to courthouses and may change the way cases are handled.

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News Item

Supreme Court authorizes new pilot to expand role of legal paraprofessionals

Posted: Thursday, March 14, 2019



The Minnesota Supreme Court has established an implementation committee for a new pilot that will permit legal paraprofessionals to provide legal advice, and in some cases, represent a client in court when under the supervision of a Minnesota attorney. The Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project is intended to increase access to civil legal representation in case types where one or both parties typically appear without legal representation. This pilot is an outgrowth of the recommendations made by the 2017 Minnesota State Bar Association's **Alternative Legal Models Task Force**.

The project will be co-chaired by Minnesota Supreme Court Associate **Justice Paul C. Thissen** and Minnesota Court of Appeals **Judge John R. Rodenberg**. The implementation committee of the pilot includes legal experts from throughout Minnesota and will produce recommendations for implementing and evaluating the pilot by February 28, 2020. Other states have studied this issue and implemented rules to allow for limited legal representation by paraprofessionals.

The scope of the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project will be limited to one of three areas of unmet need in civil law—housing disputes, family law, and creditor-debtor disputes. These three civil case types have a high frequency of asymmetrical representation or low overall representation.

Minnesota courts data shows that in creditor-debtor cases 96 percent of creditors have representation and seven percent of debtors have representation. Housing disputes see similarly unbalanced but also low rates of representation with 51 percent of landlords represented and three percent of tenants represented. In family law cases, the majority of parties are unrepresented.

“Our data shows unmet need for legal representation in our courts,” said Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea. “The Legal Paraprofessionals Pilot Project is an opportunity to help lower income Minnesotans get the legal representation they may need, but often cannot afford, in civil matters. I’m pleased Justice Thissen and Judge Rodenberg have agreed to lead the committee to study this pilot’s implementation.”

See Minnesota Supreme Court [Order ADM19-8002](#) for further information.

