



MACM MATTERS

Fall Winter
2025-26

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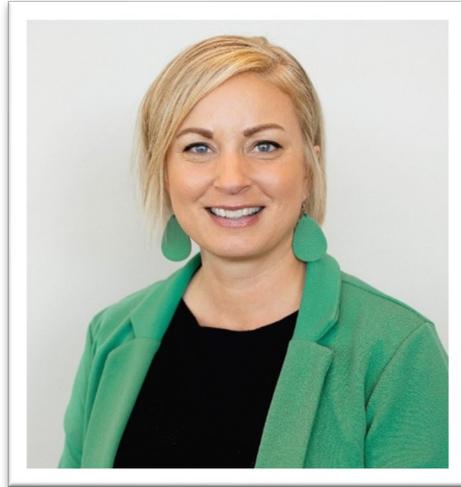
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MACM Conference

Enlighten 2025

A Vision for Tomorrow: Leading with Strength and Unity

By: Megan Bergman, MACM President



This past year has been a period of significant growth, not just for me personally in my role as President and as a court leader, but for our entire organization. We've witnessed firsthand how coming together truly brings out our greatest strengths. As we look ahead into an unknown future, as the leaders in collaboration with several other agencies, all of us facing a budget crisis, it's clear that now is the time for us to embrace a bold and unifying vision.

Strategic Planning for a Resilient Future

My true vision for our organization revolves around leveraging this challenging period to tap into our collective potential and emerge even stronger. This requires strategic vision and mission planning and, yes, some strategic rebranding to clearly articulate the immense value we provide.

The core of this vision is twofold:

1. **Cultivating Growth and Opportunity:** We must redouble our commitment to providing ample opportunities to grow and learn. In times of scarcity, knowledge and skills are our most powerful resources. By investing in the development of our court leaders, we are investing in the stability and innovation of the justice system they serve.
2. **Creative Resourcefulness:** We need to get creative with the resources we have. Budget constraints shouldn't paralyze us; they should challenge us to innovate. This means seeking out non-traditional partnerships, streamlining processes, and focusing our existing funds on programs with the highest impact.

Building Strong, Innovative Leaders

We are determined to continue our vital work of building strong and innovative leaders. Our organization is more than just a support system; we are an inspiration. We've seen how resilience shines brightest when faced with adversity.

We are incredibly hopeful that our challenges will become the very force that brings out our strengths and resilience. We believe that by providing the tools, the network, and the unwavering belief in their potential, we can empower our leaders to navigate any crisis.

Our path forward is one of unity, ingenuity, and unwavering commitment to the principles of strong leadership. Let's work together to make this vision a reality. If you attended the 2025 MACM Conference in Rochester and were fortunate enough to attend the infamous Business Meeting, I'll end by sharing one of my favorite quotes I shared in our presentation.

"The best way to predict the future is to create it." ~Abraham Lincoln

And that, my friends, is what we hope to do as we dream and create a future that we believe will bring us a better tomorrow.

Education Committee Update

By: Angie Jonas, Committee Chair

Court Operations Supervisor, Ramsey County, Second District



This year's annual conference was an outstanding success, bringing together members from across the state for three days of learning, connection, and collaboration. From the opening session to the final closing remarks, the energy in the room was unmistakably positive, and the feedback we received afterward was overwhelmingly positive.

Attendees praised the conference, with many noting that it was the best event they have ever attended. Engaging speakers, well-designed sessions, and ample opportunities for networking contributed to an experience that resonated deeply with both new and returning attendees.

Of course, no large event comes without a few minor bumps. For example, some attendees shared that the box lunches were not as filling as they would have preferred. Still, the Mayo Civic Center once again demonstrated why it remains an excellent venue for our needs. Its spacious layout, modern amenities, and professional staff helped ensure that the conference ran smoothly from start to finish.

Rochester itself continues to be a wonderful host city—its walkable downtown filled with restaurants, bars, and diverse shopping options gives attendees plenty

to explore outside session hours. Many took full advantage of these nearby amenities, adding to the overall positive experience of the conference.

Accommodations at the Kahler Grand Hotel, while convenient and staffed by individuals committed to guest service, were affected by ongoing construction and challenging parking conditions. Although these issues were outside the hotel's control, a few attendees nonetheless encountered rooms that did not fully meet expectations. We appreciate everyone's patience and understanding as the area continues to improve its infrastructure.

Despite these small challenges, the MACM Education Committee succeeded in delivering another wonderful conference that offered valuable insights, meaningful connections, and an atmosphere of growth and collaboration. We are grateful to everyone who attended, contributed, and helped make this year's conference truly memorable. Planning is already underway for next year and you'll continue to notice small changes as we navigate our projected budget deficits. We will continue to deliver a wonderful conference where we focus on you, our court leaders, and building strong relationships with our peers from around the State of Minnesota.

In addition to the 2026 conference planning, the MACM Education Committee is working on bringing you valuable content, and connections, during our MACM Connection Hour virtual sessions. If you would like to be a part of future conference and content planning, please contact Angie Jonas at angela.jonas@courts.state.mn.us.

Governance Committee Update

By: Trisha Mernitz, Committee Chair

Court Administrator, Otter Tail & Wadena County, Seventh District



During the 2025 Legislative Session, lawmakers carefully considered the upcoming projected budget deficit. While the outcome for the Branch wasn't exactly what we'd hoped for, we are fortunate that the Branch didn't face budget cuts as many others did. Limited funding was received for some of our key priorities. You can find more information and a summary of the Judiciary and Public Safety Omnibus budget bill in this [5/30/25 Branching Out article](#).

As with our 2024 conference, this year the Governance Committee again chose to support two charitable organizations local to the Rochester area: [Jeremiah Program](#), which is committed to disrupting generational poverty, and [Dorothy Day](#). Attendees supported these programs with monetary donations and supplies. The total dollar amount raised for Jeremiah Program was \$2,535, with \$955 of that coming from silent auction baskets. The 9th District gets bragging rights this year, coming in first for highest dollar amount donated, with \$360 donated! WOW!! Not far behind them was the 3rd District with

\$290, and the 10th District with \$255. Thank you to everyone for your generosity!! Also, many supplies were donated to the Dorthy Day program.

A couple of additional updates to the Bylaws were adopted during the business meeting based on suggestions from members. These additional updates cleaned up and clarified some language. Members are encouraged to continue to suggest updates. Bylaws will be reviewed again by the committee in 2026.

We had a great turnout for 2025 MACM Day at the Capitol! The committee chose to offer two date options to members, which seemed to work well. We had a total of 22 members attend between the two days. Feedback from members who attended was positive and the committee agreed to again offer two dates in 2026. The committee will be working to set the two dates in 2026 very soon. We hope to help members better understand the legislative process and be more involved in promoting the Branch's priorities.

The Governance Committee has a few other exciting things to watch for on the horizon as well! We are looking at offering a charitable drive in February/March, and we have been throwing around ideas to change it up a bit from a typical drive – stay tuned for more info! We're also keeping Law Day on our radars as we approach 2026; several committee members are able to offer suggestions to help generate ideas for hosting your own Law Day event, so please reach out if you would like to connect with us on the topic! We're always looking for additional ideas and are always happy to share ideas!

Finance Committee Update

By: Meghan Knapp, Committee Chair
Accounting Manager, First Judicial District



It was wonderful to see so many of you at this year's conference. It is always great to connect with colleagues from across the state as we come together to continue our professional development. One of my favorite parts of the conference is hearing the district updates. I enjoy learning what other districts are working on, how they are being innovative, and how they are planning for the future—especially as they address potential budget challenges. We can learn so much from one another, and I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate.

At the fall 2024 conference, I asked members to consider ways MACM could spend down funds to address a recent audit finding regarding account balances being too high. I am happy to report that we successfully reduced our balances by offsetting

conference costs for 2024 and 2025 using existing MACM funds. As a result, this audit finding has now been resolved.

Looking ahead, the MACM Board will be evaluating all aspects of the conference to identify areas where we can reduce costs while continuing to provide the high-quality content you have come to expect. You may have already noticed some cost-saving measures this year, such as not providing pop or snacks at the conference. In addition, the Board held its annual meeting at the Olmsted County Courthouse, as they graciously offered us space at no cost. Reducing expenses in these areas allows us to direct more of our funds toward conference content. While things may look a bit different in the coming years, please know that MACM remains committed to providing as many valuable opportunities for our members as possible.

Below are our account balances as of November 30, 2025. Please note that we still have outstanding conference invoices, so these balances will change by the end of December.

Account Balances as of 11-30-25
Regular Account: \$20,932.50
Special Account: \$7,679.41
Total: \$28,611.91

Finally, we are always happy to welcome new members to any of our four committees: Education, Finance, Governance, or Membership. Joining a committee is a great way to become more involved with MACM. If you are unsure whether a committee is right for you, feel free to reach out to a committee chair or another member to learn more. You never know—you could be the next MACM Treasurer!

Membership Services Committee Update

By: Julie Harris, Committee Chair
Minnesota Tax Court Administrator



Happy New Year greetings from the Membership Services Committee! I am happy to share that MACM has grown by 20 new members this year. Welcome to all of our new members!

The committee was very busy this fall conference planning and is happy to report it was a wonderful conference filled with great content, wonderful food, connecting with peers across the state, and fun. Rochester is a great place to explore, with high quality restaurants and fun atmosphere. In the Kahler Grand Elizabethan room, there was no shortage of atmosphere, food, connecting, and good game competition, as

Membership Services hosted the New Member Mixer. What a great way for new conference attendees and new members to get acquainted, network with seasoned members, and participate in activities to earn prizes!

A special thank you to all who attended the vendor show this year. We had a great turn-out with 10 vendors, gift card prizes, food/beverages, and a fan favorite - mini golf, all around. The vendor show is a great opportunity to review innovative products, services, and technologies that directly support mission needs. Not everyone makes decisions to purchase products, however everyone has a valuable voice when it comes to offering perspectives on what could be a beneficial purchase! We hope you enjoyed the conference gift this year. The committees enjoyed working together to develop the conference title Enlighten 2025, thoughtfully complimented by a flashlight gift.

Many congratulations to this year's conference award winners! The Membership Services committee pours great effort into the review of nominations annually, with the difficult responsibility of choosing recipients from an often large list of deserving candidates. Nominating a colleague—and being selected to receive this award—is a significant honor within our organization and a meaningful way to recognize outstanding contributions by our peers.

We hope attendees enjoyed the Fall Harvest themed networking suites! The room was packed with laughter, crafts, comfort foods, and music. Many thanks to the organizers for your hard work, for many to enjoy.

Additional highlights of the conference included an opportunity for professional headshots, a courthouse tour of the Olmsted County Courthouse – guided by Hans Holland, and another exciting 3rd day event comprised of relay races, team participation, resounding cheering, and triumph by the winners! I would like to recognize the organizers and participants for the hard work that went into the planning and participating. Team-building events are crucial because they create opportunities for meaningful connection, mutual understanding, and a stronger sense of belonging among team members...and did we ever have fun!

On a final note, MACM has a scholarship opportunity available, with an application deadline of January 30, 2026. The MACM Scholarship Program is intended to financially support members' education in an effort to improve administration and quality of services of the Courts of the State of Minnesota. The maximum award per fiscal year is \$2,000. Please take advantage of this wonderful opportunity and submit your application today! Applications emailed to me, Julie.V.Harris@state.mn.us, by the deadline will be considered at the February 2026 Membership Services Committee meeting.

Best wishes for a healthy and joyful 2026!

MACM CONFERENCE

Enlighten 2025 (Oct. 7 - 9)

Jeff Shorba Calls for Courageous Leadership and Collaboration at 2025 MACM Conference and honors Fifth and Tenth Judicial District Teams with State Court Administrator's Awards

At the 2025 Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) Annual Conference, State Court Administrator Jeff Shorba opened with a call for “courageous leadership” and renewed collaboration as the Judicial Branch navigates fiscal challenges, technological change, and growing public expectations.

Speaking to court leadership from across the state, Shorba praised MACM as “one of the most important gatherings for our Branch, a time to learn from one another, to recharge, and to reflect on where we’ve been and where we’re going.” He emphasized the conference theme, *Enlighten 2025*, as a reminder that leadership means “shedding light on the path ahead for others,” while staying grounded in shared values and supporting employee wellness.

Shorba also reflected on the 20th anniversary of the Judicial Council, noting that the council’s collaborative model of governance has allowed the Branch to weather crises and lead national innovation in access to justice. “The reason our Branch has been able to weather challenges and make progress,” he said, “is because we chose to govern ourselves with unity, collaboration, and courage.”

He outlined the work of the new Access and Service Delivery (ASD-3) Committee, which is tasked with preparing the Branch for future fiscal and operational pressures. Nearly 350 judges and staff have already submitted more than 1,300 ideas to the committee. “The work of ASD-3 is about resilience,” Shorba said. “It’s about ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of Minnesotans without sacrificing fairness, quality, or accessibility.”

In keeping with the conference’s spirit of recognizing innovation and service, Shorba presented the 2025 State Court Administrator’s Awards to two outstanding teams:

- The Fifth Judicial District Court Administrative Team, honored for transforming court operations through specialization and collaboration. The team consolidated 15 county finance systems into three, created expert-led districtwide units for key case types, and achieved a 100% race data collection rate in CHIPS cases, setting a statewide example for excellence.



With State Court Administrator Jeff Shorba is Cathy Celander, Chair of the Fifth District Court Administrative Team, accepting the award on behalf of the team.

- The Tenth Judicial District Court Operations Trainers: Lisa Bonke, Tammy Voigt, and Tamra Bostick, recognized for building a culture of learning through over 400 training sessions, a tiered curriculum, and more than 200 standardized court processes. Their work has improved consistency, streamlined onboarding, and strengthened operations across the Branch.



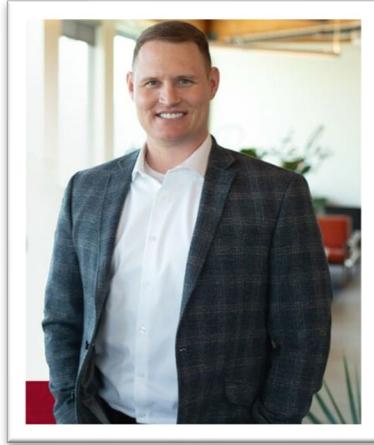
Lisa Bonke (center) and Tammy Voigt (right) is pictured above with State Court Administrator Jeff Shorba.

He closed with a powerful reminder that “when we face challenges with unity, vision, and courage, we emerge stronger.” Shorba urged MACM members to “lead with courage and keep our commitment strong, for the future of this Branch and for all Minnesotans who depend on us.”

Front Line Leadership: How to Eliminate Complacency and Build All in Engagement – Patrick Nelson

By: Lacey Staeffler, Court Operations Supervisor, Lyon and Lincoln Counties

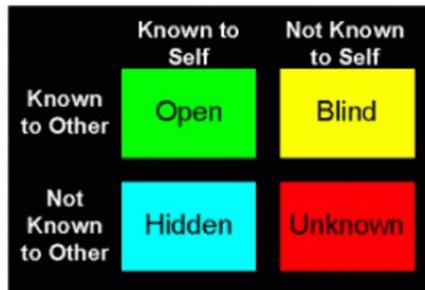
After enlisting in the Army soon after high school, Patrick cultivated his leadership skills and behaviors during his nearly 7 years of service. His personal experiences, successes and failures have shaped him into the leader he is today. Patrick’s mission is to inspire others and influence the future.



Plenary Speaker Patrick Nelson

Patrick started his presentation with great energy, immediately engaging the audience. He kept our attention through interactive activities, and his boisterous voice brought enthusiasm to the session. His personal story—about a time he felt he failed to lead his team during one of his deployments—resonated deeply with many. It was truly an honor to hear from someone who has received both the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

Patrick then spoke about horizontal and vertical development and the distinct roles each plays in our personal and leadership growth. He emphasized that the more consistent we are in applying what we learn, the better we become—both as individuals and as leaders.



“Lead yourself first if you expect others to lead” was a quote Patrick shared relating to self-awareness, personal discipline and leading by example. A question to ask yourself: How do others see you? A great model to help people understand their relationship with themselves and others is the “Johari Window.” This model has and continues to be used to improve self-awareness, communication, and relationships by encouraging individuals to increase the “open” area. Seek feedback and self-disclose!



A fixed mindset keeps you inside your comfort zone, avoiding challenges for fear of failure or judgment. In contrast, a growth mindset encourages you to step outside that comfort zone, viewing challenges as opportunities to learn and improve. Embracing a growth mindset means believing that effort leads to growth and that setbacks are part of the journey toward success.

Five essentials of service-based leadership include 1) leadership visibility, 2) setting the tone, 3) closing your mouth and opening your ears, 4) know, trust, and like, and 5) helping people grow. Service-based leadership is grounded in visibility, authenticity, and a genuine commitment to others’ development. Effective leaders

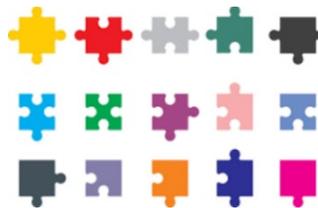
remain present and approachable, setting the tone through their actions and values. They listen more than they speak, fostering understanding and trust within their teams. By building relationships based on knowing, trusting, and liking one another, they create strong connections that drive collaboration. Above all, service-based leaders focus on helping people grow—empowering others to build their skills, confidence, and potential.

Patrick concluded his presentation by focusing on leadership and accountability. He reminded us that it's easy to be accountable when things are going well, but true leadership is demonstrated when we take ownership during challenging times. Leaders and team members who practice accountability in both good and difficult moments build trust, resilience, and credibility.

Patrick's book titled "Front-Line Leadership: How to Eliminate Complacency and Build All-In Engagement" is available for purchase. [Front-Line Leadership: How to Eliminate Complacency and Build All-In Engagement: Nelson, Patrick: 9781394240753: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781394240753)

Breakout: Front Line Leadership: Leading Through Influence

By: Lacey Staeffler, Court Operations Supervisor, Lyon and Lincoln Counties



This wasn't our typical breakout session, but it was fun to try something new and keep everyone engaged. To kick things off, Patrick had us go around the room counting aloud. If someone said a specific number—or if their number was divisible by that number—Patrick would shout "boom," and that person had to take a seat. During the activity, he intentionally got close to participants and raised his voice, adding pressure to intimidate and prompt mistakes. It served as a powerful illustration of how pressure at work—and a leader being "in your face"—can lead to errors and discomfort. Patrick reminded us that we need to have the courage to speak up and ask for help when needed. When we continually give without refueling, burnout sets in, and both energy and performance diminish.

The next activity involved each of us being blindfolded and seated in a circle. We were given limited information and could only ask certain questions to our peers as we worked together to identify the missing color and piece from the set, we were each provided. It was a fantastic team-building exercise that emphasized clear communication, collaboration, patience, and problem-solving at its finest. Overall, it was a fun and engaging breakout session with a valuable lesson in teamwork and resilience.

Minnesota State Retirement System (MSRS) Breakout Session

Donna Larson a representative from MSRS presented on the State retirement benefits. MSRS is the employee pension plan for State employees – 90% of all State employees are members. The pension plan gives monthly benefits based on your salary for your last 5 years of service or your high five and your total years of service. The Health Care Savings Plan (HCSP) contributions are tax-free, and distributions are tax-free. No social security, Medicare or income tax is taken out. It can be used to pay for insurance premiums including health, medical, dental and long-term care insurance as well as dental expenses, eye care expenses, co-pays and prescription drugs upon separation or retirement. Donna also went over the MN Deferred Comp 457 plan which is a voluntary plan that can fill the gaps in retirement income and is used to complement your pension and social security benefits. This session was very informative and well attended by participants. For more information their new website is www.mnretire.gov.

Be Ready: Using Vital to Prepare for ASD-3

Connie Gackstetter (Organizational Effectiveness Consultant, Strategy, Performance, & Projects Office - SPPO) and Aaron Lauer (Policy and Planning Consultant, Strategy, Performance, & Projects Office - SPPO) gave an interactive presentation “Be Ready: Using Vital to Prepare for ASD-3.” As the Judicial Branch experiences uncertainty regarding future budgets, MACM is being asked to start thinking about innovative ways to deliver our daily court services more efficiently. As court leaders, we know how challenging it can be to implement major changes in our organization, especially if judges, staff, justice partners, and customers are comfortable with existing processes and court tools.

Connie and Aaron provided an overview of the VITAL stages (Vision, Incentive, Training, Action, Lasting), which can be used for any change management scenario. Providing 3 hypothetical ASD-3 proposals, breakout groups were formed, and attendees were asked to discuss how each stage of VITAL could be applied. These exercises were very helpful to demonstrate how we can use VITAL to “be ready” to manage the changes ahead of us.

Court leaders can learn more about the [Access and Service Delivery \(ASD\)](#) initiative, as well as the VITAL stages by visiting the [MJB Organizational Change Management page](#).

2nd Day Plenary: "Life-Undeferred: Unlock the Dream Life Already Inside" with Jerrid Sebesta

By: Julie Harris, Minnesota Tax Court Administrator

Step into who you are. Connect with your soul...breakthrough.



Plenary speaker Jerrid Sebesta

Breakthrough happens when you elevate closer to who you actually are. Connecting your outer world, to your inner world. To fully express who we are with the outside world, is to be in alignment. Strive for utility, using your gifts, talents, and skills for a higher purpose.

Step 1: Ask yourself who you want to become. Becoming is the journey. Many people follow the have-do-be model, but that is

backward. When I have this...then I will... This is waiting for the world to show up...living a life deferred. Instead, become first, then do, then have! You validate yourself and start becoming. Transformation happens on the inside first, and that is lasting change. You set the intention “this is who I am,” and your actions will be in alignment with who you are. When you become, your identity shifts. The cheat code isn’t *doing* more, it’s *becoming* more. Remove the things that aren’t helping you, and are holding you back. Think differently. Give it a target date greater than 6 months, but less than 18 months. Go there in your mind. Dislodge from your logical brain. Dream. How do you want to feel? Connect with your future self, emotionally. Your destiny will seek you. When do you feel most alive, on fire? Reconnect with your “why.”

Step 2: Create 3 priorities for your future self. A priority is not a goal. What are three areas of your life/future that are on fire? (ex. family, brain/intellectual property, income) Professional life needs to be a top priority.

Step 3: Make a massive goal (1 to 3) toward that priority. Growth follows discomfort every time. Make your goals uncomfortable. What do you feel when you look at your schedule? 50/50 excitement and terror? You be the creator of your future.

Step 4: Chunk your big goal down into something you can do this quarter, apply it right now. More utility, more connection, to help your organization. Decide what you need to *start* doing and *stop* doing right now. “As a man thinketh, so is he.”

What Action do you need to take? 4 Actions:

1. Bold Action
2. Inspired Action – aligned to who you are
3. Lazer-focused Action – you can do anything, but you can’t do everything
4. Messy Action – just get into the arena.

Find someone that annoys you, to keep you on track, and reframe your thinking to be grateful for that opportunity. This is leveling up. Respond from wholeness, live in wholeness, you will lack nothing. Become of vessel of light and giving. Come alive. What else is possible?!

MACM Award Presentation

Congratulations to five outstanding employees honored at this year's conference.

- Coach/Mentor of the Year: Lisa Havluck (Ninth District)
- Early Career Excellence: Nicolas Pritchard-Gutknecht (Fourth District)
- Champion of Change: Pam Kilpela (Fourth District)
- Distinguished Service: Gena Jones (Second District)
- Lifetime Achievement: Kris Cunningham (Tenth District)



Pictured L to R: Lisa Havluck, Pam Kilpela, Gena Jones, Kris Cunningham, Nicolas Pritchard-Gutknecht



L to R: Kris Cunningham (Honoree), Megan Bergman (MACM President), Gena Jones (Honoree)

Embracing AI at MJB

By: Katie Anderson, Multi-County Court Administrator

During this breakout session, the AI Response (AIR) Committee delivered a crucial update to MACM members regarding the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the Judicial Branch. Presenters Dana Bartocci, HR director_and ITD Director, Jason Betz provided an insightful overview of both the policy changes and the technological developments on the horizon.

Dana Bartocci kicked off the seminar with a quick "pulse check" to assess current AI usage and comprehension among attendees. This provided context for the committee's work in establishing a safe and effective AI strategy.

Bartocci detailed the significant policy shifts driven by the AIR Committee's commission. She explained the transformation from an initial stance of AI prohibition to the current organizational embrace of the technology. The new focus is on strategically adopting AI to protect personnel and enhance operations across the Judicial Branch. This policy roadmap represents a major institutional pivot toward leveraging technology for the benefit of the branch.

Following the policy review, Jason Betz demonstrated several cutting-edge tools currently being developed for use within the branch. This segment offered MACM members a concrete look at the future workflow.

The main demonstration focused on the CAP AI tool, which is actively under development. This preview showcased the immediate technological future and what members can expect to see integrated soon. Beyond CAP AI, Betz also discussed other exploratory AI initiatives, including:

- Chatbots: For enhancing support and information access.
- Automated Note-Taking Software: To increase efficiency and accuracy in meetings and hearings.

The session helped to clarify the Judicial Branch's commitment to a deliberate and secure integration of AI. The combined update—covering the strategic policy framework and the specific tools being built—provided MACM members with a comprehensive and actionable understanding of the AI roadmap.

Preparing for the Gap: Practical Tools for Centralizing - Featuring Morgan Spah & Kelly Engle

By Tiffany Simrell, Court Operations Supervisor, McLeod County

As Minnesota courts continue to evolve and modernize, centralization has emerged as a strategic approach to improving efficiency, accuracy, and staff satisfaction. In the breakout session titled *"Preparing for the Gap: Practical Tools for Centralizing,"* Morgan Spah, Statewide Self-Help Supervisor, and Kelly Engle, Business Process Specialist with the State Court Administrator's Office (SCAO), shared practical tools and insights for navigating this process.

Building on the groundwork laid by earlier efforts—ASD-1 and ASD-2—the current phase, ASD-3, is focused on evaluating the cost, feasibility, and service impacts of expanding centralized court functions. As Spah and Engle explained, successful centralization is not just about shifting work; it's about managing change thoughtfully, with input from those most affected.

Key themes throughout the session included understanding the difference between voluntary change and mandated change, defining the project scope early while

maintaining flexibility, and continuously identifying impacted stakeholders. The presenters emphasized the importance of judicial input and considering how changes will affect both the public and justice system partners. Most importantly, they highlighted the role of clear, consistent communication throughout the process.

To ground these ideas in real-world application, the presenters offered two centralization examples. Spah highlighted the development of centralized contact centers that streamline how courts respond to public inquiries. Engle discussed centralized case processing models, focusing on the impact on supervision, staffing, and business practices.

Participants then engaged in a collaborative group activity, organized by county size—small, medium, large, and extra-large. Each group reviewed a fictional court services scenario and, using six evaluation criteria, determined whether a centralized, decentralized, outsourced, or hybrid model would best serve the situation. Their presentations sparked meaningful dialogue about the trade-offs and benefits of each approach across different court environments.

The session underscored that centralization in Minnesota courts must be tailored, strategic, and people focused. With thoughtful planning and the right tools, court leaders can build models that not only improve operations but also enhance service to the public and satisfaction among court staff.

Leading Inclusive Conversations: Navigating Difficult Discussions

By: Aimee Primus, Multi-County Court Administrator, Lyon and Lincoln Counties

At this year's conference, attendees had the opportunity to hear from Paula O'Laughlin in her engaging presentation, *"Leading Inclusive Conversations: Navigating Difficult Discussions."* The session focused on how we, as members of the court system, can approach diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) conversations with openness, curiosity, and self-awareness.

O'Laughlin began by reminding us why DEI work matters: it's about recognizing our shared humanity and ensuring the dignity of every person we encounter. Participants reflected on the Minnesota Judicial Branch's commitment to diversity — not just as an acknowledgment of our differences, but as a foundation for understanding and connection.

Through an interactive "Friendly Feud" activity, the group explored common fears surrounding difficult DEI discussions in the workplace. O'Laughlin emphasized that fear is both normal and universal — a human emotion that signals we care about getting it right.

A key takeaway from the session was the BRIDGE Framework, a practical tool for navigating sensitive conversations. BRIDGE stands for *Breathe, Recognize, Inquire, Discuss, Generate, and Engage*. Each step encourages us to pause, listen with

empathy, ask questions with curiosity, and work collaboratively toward understanding and repair. As O’Laughlin noted, *“It’s never too late to offer repair.”*

The session also acknowledged the challenges and resistance that can accompany DEI efforts and participants left encouraged to continue these essential conversations — with patience, humility, and a commitment to inclusion.

BCA Human Trafficking Task Force breakout presented by Rachel Fenske, Assistant Special Agent at the BCA and Trey Kettwick from the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office

By: Vanessa Jeske, Court Administrator, Goodhue County

The Minnesota BCA Human Trafficking Task Force is a specialized unit focused on combating sex and labor trafficking through undercover operations, victim recovery, and interagency collaboration. It has been instrumental in shaping legislation and conducting high-impact investigations. There are about 20 full time staff in Minnesota that work on these types of cases. This task force was established in 2006. The mission is to investigate and disrupt human trafficking operations, recover victims and support prosecutions.

Undercover agents pose as minors or sex buyers to identify and arrest traffickers. Minnesota ranks third among U.S. states with the highest number of human trafficking cases involving both adults and minors. Sex trafficking is prevalent and often involves minors. Labor trafficking is underreported and harder to detect.

A recent operation in Rochester led to an arrest where an individual was accused of exploiting two females from the family home while his mother was not home.

Another operation recently in St. Paul led to ten arrests and the recovery of three potential victims.

The largest sex trafficking case connected to Minnesota by the number of victims involved a massive international ring that trafficked hundreds of Thai women into the United States. Federal indictments were announced in Minnesota in 2016 and 2017, leading to a total of 38 people being charged across the country for their roles in the enterprise. Authorities described it as one of the most sophisticated human trafficking operations they had ever seen, involving money laundering and a network of prostitution houses nationwide.

The BCA works with local police departments, prosecutors, and victim service organizations. Suspected trafficking can be reported via the BCA tip line at 1-877-996-6222 or email bca.tips@state.mn.us. Each tip is vetted and prioritized. An analyst is assigned to conduct a work-up on reported information. Tips are worked, referred or closed.

Cultivating a Culture of Wellness – Featuring Shelley Ellefson Trisha Mernitz, Monica Tschumper

By: Trisha Mernitz, Court Administrator, Otter Tail & Wadena County, 7th District

This was an interactive breakout session that was presented by members of the Workplace Wellness Advisory Council. At the beginning of the session the presenters explained the difference between individual wellness and organizational wellness. The session focused on organizational wellness, which encompasses a broader range of factors that influence the health and performance of individuals and the entire organization. During this time when we all face challenges with having limited resources available, especially in light of the projected budget deficit, members were reminded that there are resources available to us all already, and the [Workplace Wellness Sharepoint site](#) was highlighted as a place where wellness resources can be found. Members participated in group discussions to identify what's needed and what contributes to supporting organizational wellness, what role everyone plays in supporting organizational wellness, and what we can do to overcome the barriers we face. A complete list of responses to these questions was put together and is available [here](#), the numbers behind some of the responses signify responses that were given by more than one group.

Collaboration as a Catalyst for Change: Minnesota's Mental Health and Children's Justice Initiatives

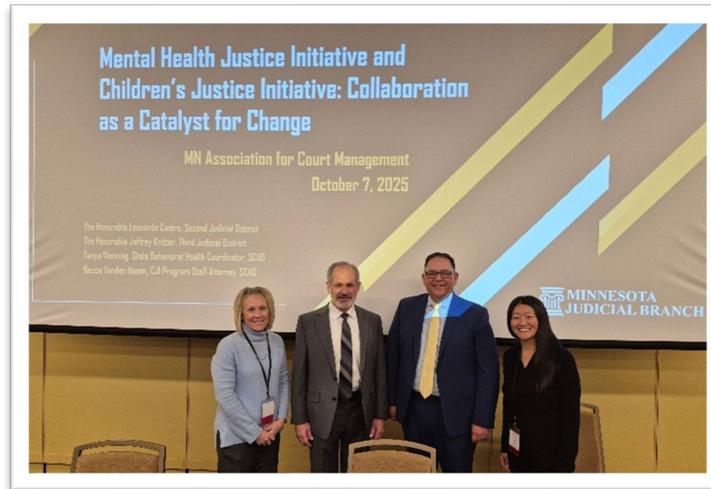
By: Kyle Irving, Manager, SCAO Project Management Office

At the Minnesota Association for Court Management (MACM) Fall Conference, a breakout session highlighted how structured collaboration can drive meaningful system reform within the judicial branch. The session focused on two long-standing but distinct efforts within the Minnesota Judicial Branch—the Mental Health Justice Initiative (MHJI) and the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI)—and explored how collaboration across disciplines serves as a catalyst for improved outcomes.

Presenters and Perspective

The session was presented by a multidisciplinary panel representing judicial leadership, statewide court administration, and program staff:

- **The Honorable Leonardo Castro**, Second Judicial District
- **The Honorable Jeffrey Kritzer**, Third Judicial District
- **Tanya Wenning**, State Behavioral Health Coordinator, State Court Administrator's Office
- **Becca Vanden Hanen**, Program Staff Attorney, Children's Justice Initiative, State Court Administrator's Office



Pictured: L to R: Becca Vanden Hanen, Honorable Jeffrey Kritzer, Honorable Leonardo Castro, Tanya Wenning

Together, the presenters offered judicial, operational, and programmatic perspectives on statewide collaboration efforts.

Mental Health Justice Initiative (MHJI)

The Mental Health Justice Initiative, formally established in December 2023, was created in response to longstanding recommendations to improve how courts respond to individuals with mental illness. Building on prior work—including a judicial workgroup report and a statewide mental health summit—the initiative serves as a collaborative forum bringing together judges, court staff, justice partners, behavioral health professionals, advocates, and individuals with lived experience.

Presenters described MHJI’s purpose as fostering open dialogue and shared problem-solving to improve outcomes for justice-involved individuals whose court involvement is driven by behavioral health needs. The initiative operates through an advisory committee supported by a steering committee to ensure alignment with Judicial Council priorities. Its scope includes monitoring court data, identifying best practices, recommending training, and advancing culturally responsive improvements to justice system processes.

The session highlighted MHJI’s structured approach, including regular advisory meetings, an annual work plan, and a biennial reporting process to inform both justice partners and Judicial Council leadership.

Children’s Justice Initiative (CJI)

The Children’s Justice Initiative, established in 2000, was presented as a mature and nationally recognized collaboration focused on improving outcomes for children who have experienced abuse or neglect. CJI operates as Minnesota’s Court Improvement Program (CIP) and partners closely with child welfare agencies, courts, and multidisciplinary teams in all 87 counties.

Presenters outlined CJI’s origins in federal CIP funding and its evolution into a statewide network supporting judicial practice, legal representation quality, and

hearing effectiveness in juvenile protection cases. Key elements include an advisory committee, a lead judges' workgroup, and targeted grant-cycle projects focused on hearing quality, legal representation, child safety, and well-being outcomes.

Accomplishments discussed included Minnesota's early adoption of multidisciplinary county teams, data-sharing advancements, support for Family First Prevention Services Act implementation, and the program's 25-year anniversary milestone.

Collaboration in Practice

A unifying theme of the session was the role of judges and court leaders as convenors—setting tone, creating space for shared ownership, and balancing statewide consistency with local innovation. The presenters emphasized that while most committees are advisory in nature, their effectiveness depends on intentional leadership, trust-building, and meaningful engagement across systems.

The session concluded with facilitated discussion prompts encouraging participants to reflect on power-sharing, resistance to change, and strategies for sustaining collaboration that leads to durable practice and policy reform.

Self-Compassion Break to Manage Stress: Patty (Devoy) Beck

By Katie Witte, Court Operations Supervisor, 3rd District

In the *Wellness Retreat Coaching* breakout session, Patty reminded us that meaningful change often begins with simple, intentional practices. One of the most accessible tools she shared was conscious breathing: taking a long, slow breath in, followed by a slow, steady breath out. This small pause can ground us in the present moment, calm the nervous system, and create space to respond rather than react as we move through our day.

Patty also challenged the way we speak to ourselves. While many of us are taught to be supportive, compassionate friends, we can be surprisingly harsh and critical when it comes to our own inner dialogue. The invitation was clear: grant yourself grace. Offer yourself the same care, patience, and understanding you would readily give to a friend who is struggling. This practice of self-compassion is rooted in mindfulness, recognizing our shared humanity, and extending self-kindness—even when things don't go as planned.

Stumbling, Patty emphasized, is not a failure but a natural part of life and growth. Instead of judgment, she encouraged us to pause and ask a powerful question: *"What do I need right now?"* Approaching challenges with curiosity and a growth mindset allows us to learn, adapt, and move forward with resilience. In doing so, we create a more supportive relationship with ourselves—one that nurtures well-being, growth, and lasting change.

3rd Day Plenary: “The Readiness Reset: Building Clarity and Confidence in Court Leadership,” with Debbie Peterson

By: Julie Harris, Minnesota Tax Court Administrator



Plenary speaker Debbie Peterson (L) with Conference Attendee Shawna Kramer

Debbie Peterson presented on the Why, What, Who, and How in getting clarity to lead well.

Why – Take the time to think about what is meaningful to you. How do you want to use your time? Clarity is personal, use the clarity compass framework to determine your “why.” Your “why” is your NorthStar, connecting you to your purpose, passion, gifts, skills, uniqueness. Resiliency comes from knowing your “why.”

What – What could be next for you? What is your next level? This could mean upleveling your current position (ex. more visibility, training, healing, getting healthy, etc.). This step is to intentionally plan for what is next in your career, setting a goal. SMART goals help you get the information. Aim goals are lofty and aspirational; end goals are specific. Get clear on these.

Who – You need a team who has your back. Not everyone who is with me, is for me. Be aware of energy vampires. Identify people who have done what you want to do, are amazing leaders, etc. You need these people around you. Protect your time and your peace, especially if there are negative things happening around you. Who in your life can help you? There are engines and anchors. Engines give you fuel and energy, anchors keep you where you are at. Find people who support you. Many minds make light work. Understand what your goals mean to you and the specific steps to get there.

How - Map your way. Demonstrate with an organizational type chart. Put the aspirational goal in the CEO position. Make a list of what is in the way between you and your goals. (ex. insecurity, mindset, time, energy, distractions, fear, people, money). Either we are putting our resources toward our goals, or we are letting obstacles get in the way. We have control and influence over our obstacles. Success happens by choice not by chance. Small consistent actions achieve goals.

To get started, focus on two things that matter most and let the rest go!

Turn the page to spot new and familiar faces in the 2025 MACM Conference group photo.



2025 MACM Conference Attendees

The conference concluded on an energetic note with *Minute to Win It* activities.



(Photo Left) Minute to Win it referees: (L) Tiffany Simrell - 1st District and (R) Jamie Majerus - SCAO



(Photo Right) Smiles all around, from challengers to spectators

Thank you again to our 2026 MACM Conference Gold Vendors!

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Gold Vendors of the 2026 MACM Conference: Klein McCarthy Architects, Fine Point Technology, iSpace Environments, Northland & Companies, CTi, i3 Verticals, Wold Architects & Engineers, and BKV Group. Your unwavering support and commitment were

instrumental in making the 2026 Vendor Show a resounding success, creating an engaging and enjoyable experience for all of our members.

Thanks to your contributions, we were able to offer an event that not only highlighted the latest industry innovations but also fostered valuable connections and opportunities for growth. Your involvement helped elevate the quality of the event and ensure its lasting impact.

We are deeply grateful for your partnership and look forward to continuing to work together in the future. We couldn't have achieved this level of success without your dedication and collaboration. Thank you once again for being an essential part of this incredible experience!
