



Used with permission from
The Hennepin Lawyer,
membership publication of the
Hennepin County Bar Association
612-752-6000 thl@hcba.org

Will the Judge Listen to Me?

Working with children clients (as I do) can give a lawyer a fresh perspective about our profession. As I worked on this issue of *The Hennepin Lawyer*, I recalled several refreshing first meetings with child clients: painting the picture of what court is and what happens there in the simplest of terms has often given me a renewed appreciation for our court system.

When I meet a new child client, who may be as young as 10 years old, the first step is an orientation to court and explanation of roles. Many of these young clients have been in court before and have a feeling for the process. To many, however, court is perceived simply as “a lot of adults talking to a person in a black robe.”

I typically explain that some of those adults are lawyers, and ask whether the client knows what a lawyer does. Most children settle on “I’m not really sure.” I explain that a lawyer helps his or her client tell the

judge the important facts and ask for what the client wants. Eyes tend to light up when these children realize they will have their OWN attorney to speak for them.

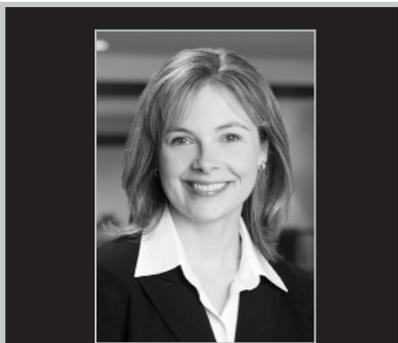
“The person with the black robe is the judge. Do you know what the judge does?” I inquire. While most young clients identify that person as being in charge, they often need help articulating what that role entails. I explain that the judge makes the decisions in a case—if people disagree about something, the judge listens to what everyone has to say, and decides what will happen.

The biggest question I get is “Will the judge listen to me?” This is my favorite part, explaining to a young person that the court is meant for *everyone* to have a fair opportunity to tell his or her story. I explain that the judge, lawyers, and everyone participating follows certain rules to make sure that the process is fair to everyone, so that the judge can use the information she learns to make a fair decision. The clients like the sound of that, and so do I. Boiled down to its most basic elements for a child client, the value and importance of the judicial system seems clearer than ever.

Every January, *The Hennepin Lawyer* looks at how the court system and officers of the court are working to deliver justice; this issue discusses many noteworthy developments. **Chief Judge James Swenson** recognizes positive happenings in the Hennepin County District Court, particularly the efforts of justice partners helping to ease the court's budget crisis. **Judge Mark Wernick** examines how Hennepin County's new criminal calendaring pilot will improve the quality



of justice. **Steven Rau** highlights important changes in the Local Rules of Practice for Minnesota's federal court practitioners. **Mercedes Gustafson** provides a look at how changes in conciliation court could alleviate budgetary burden in the courts. **Andrea Nordick** discusses the increasing number of pro se litigants, and the services available to help them access the court system. **Judge Lloyd Zimmerman** shares the insider's view about employment litigation, insight that will have immense value for all litigators. A profile of Judge Joseph Klein by **Rebecca Vandenberg**, esoteric musings by **Gary Weissman**, and **Chris Morris'** account of his judicial ride-along round out the issue. Perhaps with these articles, or with inspiration from my young clients, you too will find renewed appreciation for our court system. 



Lori Semke
Issue Editor

Ms. Semke is a staff attorney with the Children's Law Center of Minnesota, focusing on special projects and systemic reform efforts in addition to representing child clients and supporting CLC volunteer attorneys.