



## AJA MEMBER PROFILE

### Chief Judge Kevin S. Burke Hennepin County, Minnesota

**F**or nearly two decades, Kevin S. Burke has served Minnesota's largest metropolitan court, beginning as a district court judge in 1984. Since then, Judge Burke has served as chair of the Minnesota Conference of Chief Judges, assistant chief judge of Hennepin County District Court, presiding judge of the Hennepin County District Court Drug Court, and, currently, chief judge of Hennepin County District Court.

As chair of the Minnesota State Board of Public Defense, Judge Burke spearheaded the transformation of the public defense delivery system in Minnesota. As a result, a new unified, statewide, and state-funded public defense system has replaced an underfunded, county-by-county appointed counsel system.

For five years, Judge Burke served as chair of the Conference of Chief Judges, the administrative policymaking body of the Minnesota trial courts. He has worked with the state's chief justice and other key judicial representatives to lead a strategic planning process for the judiciary, to develop and communicate a vision of an effective and innovative court system, and to fashion a legislative agenda and public education program to support the organizational needs and goals of the Minnesota Judicial System.

Judge Burke was an early leader in promoting community outreach by judges to enhance public understanding and support for the Minnesota Judicial System. For several years he has hosted a weekly cable program in the Twin Cities area called "Meet Your Court." As a recognized expert in judicial/media relations, and for his unique accessibility as a judge to the media, the Society for Professional Journalists presented him with their Award of Merit. He has supported the development

of self-help and domestic violence resource centers in the Hennepin County Courthouse, which have served as models for other jurisdictions.

Judge Burke was the driving force in the creation of the Hennepin County Drug Court, the first drug court in Minnesota and the first in the country to focus on all felony-level drug cases. After two years, evaluations showed that the drug court decreased time between arrest and resolution by a factor of five, imprisoned and incarcerated the most serious offenders at a rate higher than the rest of the state, and reduced offenders' use of drugs. His work earned national attention.

A second innovation of national significance is Judge Burke's pioneering efforts to study, measure, and enhance the perception and reality of fairness experienced by litigants in his court. He shared findings from a study of fairness in his court with colleagues, and judges volunteered to be videotaped on the bench and critiqued on their listening and communication abilities to help improve their judicial skills.

Judge Burke has also worked to adapt the tools of the quality management movement to improve court functions. As the first judicial system in the country, Judge Burke is leading his court in participating in the rigorous Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award evaluation process, which emphasizes management through measurable results.

Throughout his career, Judge Burke has assisted other state courts and promoted the improvement of the administration of justice through federal agencies and national organizations. He speaks at judicial conferences and has served for many years on the National Center for State Courts

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