



Brown Bag Briefing:

THE INFINITY PROJECT: Women & the Federal Court

Several Consortium member groups, including the **Center on Women & Public Policy** at the University of Minnesota and **Minnesota Women Lawyers**, are leaders in an effort to increase gender diversity among judges of the U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

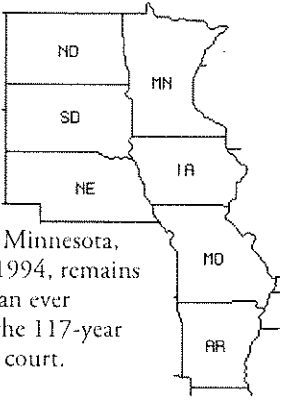
The 94 U.S. judicial districts are organized into 12 regional circuits, each of which has a United States court of appeals. A court of appeals hears appeals from the district courts located within its circuit, as well as appeals from decisions of federal administrative agencies.

The seven states making up the Eighth Circuit, each currently represented by one or two judges, are Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Missouri, and Arkansas.

According to a recent issue of *Minnesota Lawyer*, "Thirteen years ago, a gender-bias study of the [8th Circuit Court] found that, with only one woman on its bench, the court was lagging behind in terms of gender diversity. Nine judges have been appointed to the court since then -- and all of them have been men."




Sixteen of the 17 judges now serving on the 8th Circuit bench are men.

Judge Diana E. Murphy of Minnesota, appointed in 1994, remains the only woman ever appointed in the 117-year history of this court.



How are these judges selected? They are nominated by the President & confirmed by the United States Senate, as stated in the Constitution. The names of potential nominees often are recommended by U.S. Senators or sometimes members of the House who are of the President's political party. The Senate Judiciary Committee typically conducts confirmation hearings for each nominee. Article III of the Constitution states that these judicial officers are appointed for a life term.

The effort to increase gender diversity on this court is called **The Infinity Project**, named for the ongoing nature of the work as well as the similarity between the number "8" and the infinity symbol. The Infinity group has three goals:

-  Create public awareness of the importance of gender equity & the availability of qualified women candidates.
-  Engage U.S. senators and other politicians on the issues of gender equity and the need for appointment of women.
-  Serve as a clearinghouse for candidates with an interest in serving on the 8th Circuit bench.

The Infinity Project will launch with an All State Summit & Inaugural Talk on October 17. The event will feature Professor Sherrilyn Ifill of the University of Maryland on the topic of "Leadership, Gender and Judicial Selection." The keynote is co-sponsored by the University of St. Thomas School of Law Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership, & the summit is supported by a grant from the Open Society Institute. Judge Murphy will be honored with establishment of the Honorable Diana E. Murphy Legacy Award, and she will join in a panel presentation on "Preparing for Diversity: A Primer on the Work of a Federal Appellate Judge."

What can you & your organization do to support this important work? Contact Deb Fitzpatrick at the Center on Women & Public Policy, dfitzpatrick@umn.edu, or 612/625-7176.