



Supreme Court of Illinois

December 3, 2025

ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF COLMAN AND KILBRIDE AWARDS

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) announced today the winners of two awards, the Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award and the Jeffrey D. Colman Access to Justice Award.

The 2025 recipients are Chief Administrative Law Judge Brian Weinthal and Brenda Sprague, Executive Assistant to the Chief Judge of the First Judicial Circuit. These awards are designed to recognize and celebrate exceptional contributions to increasing access to the court system by improving the experience of litigants.

“The ATJ Commission is thrilled to spotlight the exceptional efforts court stakeholders are making to enhance the court user experience,” said Judge Jorge L. Ortiz, Chair of the ATJ Commission. “The recipients of these awards exemplify the critical impact innovative projects, policies, and partnerships can have advancing the vital goal of increasing access to justice.”

The Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award is given to a member of the judiciary who has made a significant or meaningful contribution to increasing access to the court system by improving the experience of litigants. The 2025 awardee of The Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award is Illinois Human Rights Commission’s Chief Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Brian Weinthal. The importance of access to justice in our courts extends to administrative proceedings that may eventually be appealed to the courts. ALJ Weinthal modernized paper filings and mailed service to be able to be done electronically. He also implemented the first ever standing order for virtual hearings.

ALJ Weinthal also drafted and passed an important change to the Illinois Human Rights Act that requires the Commission (at the state’s expense) to provide language access to litigants whose first language is not English. Lastly, he led an effort to improve access to representation at the Commission by engaging with legal service organizations that are willing to provide pro bono services to self-represented litigants. By partnering with entities like CVLS, Legal Aid Chicago, Prairie State Legal, and Land of Lincoln Legal Aid, ALJ Weinthal has created another first-ever resource for administrative law judges to connect self-represented parties to pro bono service providers.

The Jeffrey D. Colman Access to Justice Award is given to a lawyer, paralegal, or court employee who has made a significant or meaningful contribution to improving access to our court system for litigants who are self-represented, limited English proficient, disabled, or otherwise vulnerable. The 2025 recipient of the Jeffrey D. Coleman Access to Justice Award is

Brenda Sprague, the Executive Assistant to the Chief Circuit Judge of the First Judicial Circuit. Brenda created, coordinated, and expanded a Lawyer in the Library program throughout the Circuit. The program is now located in 14 public libraries throughout all nine counties within the Circuit. Brenda has recruited multiple lawyers to assist the public at these events and promoted these events through numerous press releases and on social media to ensure the public is aware of these programs.

Brenda further coordinates the Illinois JusticeCorps program in which an AmeriCorps volunteer travels throughout the Circuit to provide assistance to self-represented litigants. The First Circuit faces unique and often daunting challenges: limited access to public transportation, sparse legal resources, language barriers, and the need for hearing-impaired accommodations. Brenda not only understands these obstacles—she meets them head-on with creativity, compassion, and unwavering resolve.

A reception to celebrate the awardees will be held on April 9, 2026. Save the date if you would like to celebrate these access to justice champions with us.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT the Access to Justice Division staff at AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov.)