

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT COMMISSION

# ACCESS TO JUSTICE

EDUCATION. SUPPORT. EMPOWERMENT.



**December 2023**

## A Season of Change



Justice Mary K. Rochford's time as Chair of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice ended in June, and her accomplishments must be marked with celebration. The Illinois Judicial Branch will forever be indebted to Justice Rochford. Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis says, "The Illinois Supreme Court expresses its sincerest gratitude to Justice Rochford for her tireless efforts to improving access to justice in Illinois, as first a Commissioner and then the Chair of the Commission on Access to Justice. Her steadfast leadership on these issues is unparalleled and has been instrumental in all the Commission's achievements."

The Chicago Bar Foundation appointed Justice Rochford to the Commission in 2012. Bob Glaves, Executive Director of the Chicago Bar Foundation, says of this appointment, "As we start our 75th anniversary year at the Chicago Bar Foundation, one of the most impactful actions over that time was the CBF's appointment of Justice Mary K. Rochford as our inaugural representative on the Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice. First as a Commissioner and for many years after as Commission Chair, Justice Rochford has rolled up her sleeves and led by example in helping the Commission transform access to justice in Illinois. Our justice system and the people in Illinois are all much better for it thanks to her humble leadership, dedication, and great work."

Justice Rochford, who is a justice of the First District Appellate Court, accepted the role of Chair in 2015. Since then, she has been ceaseless in her efforts to improve access to the court system for court users who are representing themselves, do not speak English as a first language, have disabilities, or otherwise find participating in the court process challenging.

Justice David Overstreet, Illinois Supreme Court liaison to the Commission, says Justice Rochford "has been a tireless advocate to provide greater access to justice for all of the people of Illinois. Her impact will continue to be felt by the people and our legal system into the future."

Justice Rochford accomplished innumerable deliverables that moved the needle of justice towards greater access. A few of her many achievements include:

- Leading the successful effort to create statewide, standardized, legal court forms in a variety of areas, including appellate, divorce, expungement, eviction, name change, procedural processes, and others, to ensure self-represented litigants can participate in their case.
- Promulgating the Illinois Supreme Court Language Access Policy that developed statewide language access protocols and policies to ensure litigants who speak languages other than English have access to qualified interpreters.
- Expanding the Illinois JusticeCorps program, which places college and law students in various courthouses across the state to assist people without lawyers.
- Launching the Court Navigator Network and the Access to Justice Court Improvement Grant Program, which has awarded over one million dollars to circuits to address challenges faced by self-represented litigants on a local level.
- Creating Illinois Court Help, a customer service hotline, which has provided excellent customer service to all 102 counties in Illinois and changed the way the judiciary views its role in providing information to the public.
- Drafting and promulgating a statewide Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Assistance to Court Patrons by Circuit Clerks, Court Staff, Law Librarians and Court Volunteers (also known as the Safe Harbor Policy), which provides guidance to people acting in a non-lawyer capacity as to what services they may and may not offer to assist court patrons.
- Guiding the court during the pandemic, especially as to the needs of self-represented litigants in remote proceedings.

Each Commissioner and member of the ATJ Division staff will continue striving to meet Justice Rochford's rigorous example. Commissioner Carolyn Clift writes, "It has been my pleasure to serve on the Access to Justice Commission under the leadership of Justice Mary Rochford. I so appreciate her insight, guidance, critical thinking, open mindedness, and always warm gracious temperament, and am grateful for her devotion to fairness and equity for all people who encounter our justice system. Many, many, many thanks to Justice Rochford for all she has done to improve and enhance the work of the Access to Justice Commission. She will be sorely missed!!!"

She was a mentor to the staff of the ATJ Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, who learned from the kindness, sense of humor, brilliance, empathy, savvy, and professionalism that she displayed in every interaction. Alison Spanner, Director of the ATJ Division, reflects that "[w]orking with Justice Rochford was a joy even when the barriers to the court system for vulnerable court users seemed impossibly large because she was receptive to exploring any idea for a new project. She was always willing to engage with curiosity and a critical eye towards how best to help the court user."



The Illinois Supreme Court has named Judge Jorge Ortiz, Circuit Court Judge with the 19th Judicial Circuit as the new Chair of the Commission on Access to Justice. Judge Ortiz, who has served on the Commission since 2018 and as a judge for 21 years, has witnessed firsthand the challenges people face in trying to navigate the court system without a lawyer. He states, "Access to justice in Illinois has improved tremendously under Justice Rochford's leadership. I firmly believe the Commission's work is invaluable

to the judicial branch, and I look forward to building on the foundation laid by Justice Rochford and current and past Commissioners.”

Another change comes as Jennifer Nijman, also an inaugural member of the Commission, reached her term limit as a member. Jennifer was an outstanding Commissioner, and her contributions at meetings and in chairing the Remote Appearance and Strategic Planning Committees will be greatly missed. Just last month we also had to say goodbye to Tammy Weikert, the Circuit Clerk of Rock Island County and the designated non-lawyer member of the Commission, as her term ended.

We welcome three new Commissioners: Judge Alison C. Conlon, Circuit Court Judge with the Circuit Court of Cook County, retired lawyer Sally J. McDonald, and Kathy McNamara, Juvenile Probation Officer in DuPage County.

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## New Five-Year Strategic Plan



The Commission has a new [Strategic Plan](#). It will span years 2023-2038 and sets out the Commission’s purpose, mission, vision, and goals and provides direction for the Commission’s activities.

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## Redesigned Statewide Standardized Forms

The Forms Team has been busy updating current forms, publishing new forms, and preparing for the launch of a new, improved form design.


Various current form sets were recently updated as a result of both rule changes and regular review processes. All five civil and criminal Fee Waiver sets, all five Summons sets, and the Limited Scope forms were republished to conform with revised Supreme Court Rules. Following several subcommittees’ annual reviews of published forms, we have also republished several [form sets](#) with changes made in response to comments from court stakeholders and the public. These include the Motion, Motion to Continue, Motion to Appoint Special Process Server, and the Adult Expungement and Sealing set. The Juvenile Expungement and Sealing set will follow shortly.

In September, the Commission was proud to publish the new [Eviction Answer and Appearance](#) form set. These forms were the product of many years of diligent work by the Eviction Forms Subcommittee, and they incorporate thoughtful feedback and contributions from the Forms Committee, as well as many stakeholders from the legal community and the public. We also anticipate publishing a new Motion to Remove Eviction Court File from Public Record form set before the end of the year. The Eviction Subcommittee believes both form sets will be important resources for self-represented litigants navigating eviction cases.

Finally, the Forms Team has been finalizing our form redesign. In 2021, the Commission engaged a graphic design consultant team to reimagine the structure and design of our current forms, with the goal of producing a new concept that is easier to use and understand. We will launch the design officially in January 2024, starting with the Adult and Minor Name Changes forms, which will also be updated following legislative changes. January 2024 will also see the publication of the redesigned Fee Waiver and several other civil procedure form sets.


As we continue to refine the design, we have received significant positive feedback about the changes. In feedback sessions, users noted that the newly redesigned forms “have improved dramatically,” are “more public-friendly,” and “seem like they were created for people who aren’t lawyers.” We look forward to eventually converting the full inventory of forms to the redesign, making our statewide standardized forms even more accessible and useful to all who need them. Here is a preview of some redesigned form elements:

### HOW TO FILE THE FORMS



#### E-filing

- After you fill out your court forms, file them with the Circuit Court Clerk. This is done by electronic filing, called “e-filing”. You do not have to e-file if:
  - you qualify for an exemption or
  - your case involves a criminal matter.
- Most people e-file their forms using Odyssey eFileIt at [icourts.info/efile](https://icourts.info/efile).
- Follow step-by-step instructions and watch videos that walk you through the steps for e-filing at [icourts.info/efilehowto](https://icourts.info/efilehowto).
- E-filing may not work on a cell phone or tablet. You may need to use a computer to e-file.
- If you do not have access to a computer or if you need help e-filing, take your completed forms to a public library or a Circuit Clerk, Appellate Clerk, or Supreme Court Clerks’ office. These places offer public computers where you can e-file your forms. Librarians and courthouse staff cannot provide legal advice.
  - You can bring your forms on paper or saved on a flash drive. The public computer will have a scanner where you can turn your paper forms into electronic files.




#### Not E-filing

- Some people are not required to e-file, which means they can file paper forms at the courthouse or by mail. People who do not have to e-file are:
  - inmates in prison or jail who do not have a lawyer
  - people with a disability that keeps them from e-filing
- You may also qualify for an exemption from e-filing if:
  - You do not have Internet or computer access in your home, and it is hard for you to travel.
  - You have trouble reading, writing, or speaking English.
  - You are filing documents in a sensitive case, such as an order of protection.
  - You tried to e-file your forms, but you were not able to because the equipment or help you needed was not available.
- To ask for an exemption from e-filing, use the form at [icourts.info/ExemptionCircuit](https://icourts.info/ExemptionCircuit). If you can’t print this form, then ask for it at your local courthouse.
  - File your *Certification for Exemption from E-Filing* form along with your other court forms at the Circuit Clerk’s office or by mail.
  - Bring or send your signed court forms and at least two copies of your forms to the Circuit Clerk’s office. Ask them to stamp your copies and return them to you.
  - If you need to make copies of your forms, you can do that at the Circuit Clerk’s office. They may charge you to make copies.
- If you mail your court forms to the Circuit Clerk’s office, include a stamped envelope addressed to you. The Circuit Clerk will file your forms and then send your copies back to you in the envelope.

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### ARE THESE FORMS FOR ME?

You may use these forms to end your marriage or civil union when:




This form is approved by the Illinois Supreme Court and is required to be accepted in all Illinois courts.

#### PETITION FOR DIVORCE WITH CHILDREN

(PETITION FOR DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE / CIVIL UNION)  
IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, CIRCUIT COURT

COUNTY	_____
(the county where <b>you’re</b> filing the case)	
PETITIONER	_____
(your first, middle, and last name)	
RESPONDENT	_____
(your <b>spouse’s</b> first, middle, and last name)	

Case \_\_\_\_\_



This form may take between 30-45 minutes to fill out. Some questions involve personal finances, so you refer to other documents to complete it. In general, there are fees to file court forms like this one, but you can file for free. Check with your local Circuit Clerk for cost and fee waiver information.

As always, the statewide standardized forms can be found at [icourts.info/forms](https://icourts.info/forms).

**Staffing Updates: The Commission is staffed by Access to Justice Division (ATJ Division) of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) and remains grateful to the Illinois Supreme Court and AOIC for this collaboration.**

First, we would like to mention some staffing changes. We said goodbye to two members of the team. **Nina Wilson**, who worked as a Court Guide on Illinois Court Help. Nina is now a full-time law student at Chicago-Kent College of Law. **Lisa Colpoys**, who was the Supervising Senior

Program Manager for Illinois Court Help and launched the program. She is now working as the Justice Innovation Lead, Filing Fairness Project at the Deborah L. Rhode Center on the Legal Profession at Stanford Law School.

Since we last provided a staffing update, five employees joined the ATJ Division:

- **Avani Patel** is the new Supervising Senior Program Manager for Illinois Court Help. She came to us from KLDDiscovery, where she was Director of Business Development. She also previously served as Supervising Attorney for the Economic Issues Program at Chicago Volunteer Legal Services.
- **Rick Hamer** is one of the Court Guides for Illinois Court Help. He came to us from the Illinois JusticeCorps program where he served as a member in Champaign County while completing his studies at the University of Illinois.
- **Daisy Fermaint** is a new Spanish-speaking Court Guide for Illinois Court Help. She came to us from the 19th Judicial Circuit and Lake County Circuit Clerk's Office.
- **Darli Cortez** is also a new Spanish-speaking Court Guide for Illinois Court Help. She has worked at the AOIC for nearly 14 years in the Judicial College Division.
- **Dorothy Ksiazek** is the new Program Coordinator for the Language Access program. She has worked at the AOIC since 2013, most recently in the Probation Services Division.



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For more information about the ATJ Commission's work, please contact Alison Spanner at [aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov)

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