

Administrative order
February 6, 1998
Amended October 1, 1999
Amended June 5, 2000
Amended April 13, 2006
Amended January 19, 2010
Amended November 30, 2010
Amended February 6, 2026

M.R. 14618

NEW JUDGE MENTORING PROGRAM

(a) Purpose. The purpose of the New Judge Mentoring Program is to assist new trial judges in the transition from attorney to judge; to provide basic assistance to the new judge prior to the mandatory new judge seminar; and to provide such assistance after the new judge seminar as the new judge may need. The mentoring program is limited to new circuit and associate judges, as it is felt that new judges in reviewing courts will be able to continue to rely upon their colleagues for assistance on an informal basis.

(b) Provisions of New Judge Mentoring Program.

(1) Administration. (A) Judicial Mentor Committee. There is created in the Illinois Judicial Branch a New Judge Mentoring Program which shall be administered by a seven-judge Judicial Mentor Committee which shall consist of the chairperson and the vice-chairperson of the Conference of Chief Circuit Judges, and five additional judges appointed by the Supreme Court for three-year staggered terms. One judge, who is either a Chief Circuit Judge or a judge responsible for the supervision of other judges, shall be appointed from each judicial district. Upon appointment of the members of the Committee, the Committee may commence any necessary organizational work to prepare for the assumption of its administrative responsibilities.

It shall be the responsibility of the Judicial Mentor Committee to develop criteria for the matching of mentors with new judges, to review the mentors' contact reports to make recommendations to the Supreme Court for modifications to the New Judge Mentoring Program, and to make an annual report to the Supreme Court relating to the operation of the program. The Committee shall be assisted by the staff of the Administrative Office.

(B) Chief Circuit Judges. The Chief Judge of each circuit shall be charged with the responsibility of ensuring that each new judge in his or her circuit participates in the New Judge Mentoring Program and determining whether the mentor assigned to each new judge provides the proper guidance and assistance contemplated by the Program.

(2) Operation. (A) Selection. The Chief Judge of each circuit shall determine the number of mentor judges necessary in order to provide for the operation of the New Judge Mentoring Program in his or her circuit. Thereafter, the Chief Judge shall solicit volunteers from the circuit and associate judges of the circuit who possess the qualifications set forth below to act as mentors. The Chief Judges shall forward to the Judicial Mentor Committee the names of the proposed mentors within their respective circuits. It shall be the obligation

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of the Judicial Mentor Committee to: (1) monitor the availability of mentors throughout the State, and (2) annually certify the mentors for each circuit from the names submitted by the Chief Judges. Once certified by the Judicial Mentor Committee, the mentors shall be available for assignment by the Chief Judge as a mentor to a new judge.

The Chief Judge shall notify the Judicial Mentor Committee of any mentor nominee who is charged with a Class C or more serious offense, or is the subject of a Courts Commission complaint.

(B) Qualifications. Each judge nominated by his or her Chief Judge for certification as a mentor shall possess the following minimum qualifications:

- a. Three years of prior judicial service;
- b. The willingness to devote the additional time needed to fulfill the duties of a mentor;
- c. A demonstrated commitment to judicial education; and
- d. The ability to interact positively with new judges; and
- e. Judges who are retired from the bench, and who are not actively engaged in the practice of law, may also serve as mentors.

(C) Training. The Judicial Mentor Committee shall develop a training seminar, in coordination with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, for new mentors and a mentoring manual for use by each mentor. If permitted by the Judicial Mentor Committee, a judge may satisfy the mentor training requirement by viewing, under conditions set by the Committee, the Judicial Mentor Training Seminar video recording produced by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts.

(D) Assignment. The Chief Judges shall assign a certified mentor to each new judge within their circuit immediately upon the new judge taking office. Once paired, the formal mentor/new judge relationship shall continue for a period of one year unless that relationship is extended for a longer period by the Chief Judge. No mentor may be assigned to more than one new judge at a time, except with the approval of the Judicial Mentor Committee.

(E) Duties. As soon as a mentor is assigned to a new judge, the mentor shall arrange an initial conference with the new judge to establish a mentoring relationship that is characterized by confidentiality, understanding and trust. At that initial conference, the mentor shall also familiarize the new judge with the policies and procedures of the circuit and other matters of concern to the new judge. The initial conference between the mentor and the new judge may take place either before or after the new judge takes office.

After taking office, but before independently hearing cases, each new judge will be afforded an opportunity to spend a minimum of two court days observing judicial proceedings, and be allowed to ask questions regarding the proceeding at the appropriate time. During these two days, the mentor should familiarize the new judge with the process of judging, placing particular emphasis upon judicial temperament and demeanor and the necessity for prompt and informed decisions.

Once the new judge begins to hear cases, the mentor should be available to meet with

the new judge as necessary and should be readily available to answer any questions that the new judge might have. Under no circumstances, however, should the duties of a mentor include substituting the mentor's judgment for that of the new judge in the decision making process.

Each new judge shall be required to attend a minimum of one Illinois Judicial Conference regional seminar during his or her first year in office. The choice of which seminar to attend shall be made in consultation with the new judge's mentor.

Each mentor shall complete a Contact Report in a form prescribed by the Judicial Mentor Committee containing the dates and methods of contact, and plans for follow-up meetings. Each such report shall be forwarded to the Chief Judge of the circuit who shall review and countersign the report before forwarding it to the Judicial Mentor Committee, which shall use the report to track the progress of the relationship of the mentor and the new judge, and for its overall evaluation of the New Judge Mentoring Program. The Contact Report may contain a general description of the subjects discussed by the mentor and new judge, but shall not contain reference to the substance of those discussions. At a minimum, the Contact Report shall be submitted at the end of the first month, ~~third, and sixth months~~ of the mentoring relationship, and at the conclusion of the relationship.

(3) Local Mentoring Programs. A judicial circuit may develop its own mentoring program for new judges and submit it to the Judicial Mentor Committee which shall forward it to the Supreme Court for approval. Upon approval by the Supreme Court, the circuit may implement and administer its program in lieu of the above New Judge Mentoring Program. Any subsequent changes to the circuit's program after its initial approval shall also be submitted to the Committee which shall forward them to the Court for approval. The circuit shall submit to the Committee an annual report relating to the operation of its program in a form prescribed by the Committee which shall be included in the Committee's Annual Report to the Court.

(4) Confidentiality. Except as otherwise required by Supreme Court Rules, information pertaining to the new judge's performance which is obtained by the mentor in the course of the formal mentoring relationship shall be held in confidence by the mentor.