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## Access to Justice Articles August-December 2024

### **Access to Justice Commission Announces Winners of Colman and Kilbride Awards – November 2024**

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) announced the winners of two awards, the Jeffrey D. Colman Access to Justice Award and The Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award. The 2024 recipients are Tiffany Schicker and Judge Thomas More Donnelly. 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 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 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 2024 awardee of the Jeffrey D. Coleman Access to Justice Award is Tiffany Schicker, who serves as the Circuit Clerk of Marion County. In her tenure as Circuit Clerk, Clerk Schicker has led several impactful initiatives, notably securing Access to Justice Improvement grant funds to enhance the courthouse experience. Her efforts have resulted in the installation of public Wi-Fi, the establishment of a comprehensive self-help center

equipped with updated technology and signage, and a forthcoming launch of a text message notification program for court users.

Clerk Schicker is an active member of the Court Navigator Network, where she facilitated a successful site visit for stakeholders from across the state, highlighting her commitment to collaboration and innovation. Her compassionate approach and proactive engagement in various committees, including the ATJ Commission's Remote Appearance Committee, Forms Committee, and Civil Procedure Forms Subcommittee, are examples of her unwavering dedication to ensuring that self-represented litigants have the resources and support they need to navigate the legal system effectively.

The 2024 awardee of The Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award is Cook County Judge Thomas More Donnelly, who has exemplified exceptional leadership in assisting self-represented litigants (SRLs) within the Circuit Court of Cook County. His vision and execution have resulted in four game-changing initiatives: the CARPLS (Coordinated Advice & Referral Program for Legal Services) Consumer Collection Self-Help Desk; Chicago Bar Association (CBA) Driver's License Statutory Summary Suspension Pro Bono Attorney Training Program; CBA Municipal Court Pro Bono Panel; and Commercial Calendar pro bono program.



Judge Donnelly has actively advocated for public policy reforms in consumer debt matters, resulting in significant advancements in the fairness and equity of court proceedings. His contributions to the Illinois judicial system have profoundly improved the lives of countless individuals facing financial difficulties and inspired legal professionals to prioritize access to justice. Additionally, Judge Donnelly's dedication to education, his support for SRLs, and his involvement in criminal justice reform initiatives reflect his passion for ensuring justice for all individuals.

A reception to celebrate the awardees will be held in the spring.

### **Giving Thanks to Access to Justice Champions – November 2024**

During this time of Thanksgiving, I want to take a moment to thank all the Commissioners on the Access to Justice Commission, our Supreme Court liaison, Justice David K. Overstreet, and our many volunteer committee members for their steadfast commitment

to increasing access to justice throughout Illinois. I also want to add a special thanks to the ATJ Division staff who shepherd the work of the ATJ Commission and are the backbone of the initiatives.

Looking outward, we also want to recognize a few of the many individuals who have made meaningful contributions to the Illinois justice system this year. At the outset, it is necessary (and hopefully obvious) to point out that this list is representative of the great work being done across the state and reflective of the many individuals who strive each day to ensure that our courts are fair and accessible.

- **Jim Muir**, Circuit Clerk of Franklin County


Jim recently regaled ATJ Division staff with a tale of a litigant who came to the courthouse from Indianapolis, IN on the wrong court date. To add a layer of complication, she also didn't speak English. Instead of sending that person away and telling her to return a different day and to bring an interpreter, he set to work to ensure she could resolve her legal issue that day. He called InLingo, the remote interpreting system, to request an interpreter. Before he made it upstairs to the courtroom, InLingo had already found an interpreter. He told the judge the situation and they handled her case that day. None of that had to happen in that way, but Jim thought about the litigant and her time and went out of his way to ensure she could access the courts right then. Those sorts of efforts are applauded.

- **Brenda Sprague & Cynthia York**, 1<sup>st</sup> Circuit Court Administrators

Brenda is a champion for promoting the opportunities and resources available to serve litigants throughout the nine-county circuit. She applies for and administers the Access to Justice Improvement grant for the Circuit for many things including the Lawyer in the Library program. Brenda's enthusiasm and compassion for providing and improving services for those litigants who are self-represented, facing language barriers, or in need of specific services is infectious. Brenda works closely with Cynthia York who initiated the 1st Circuit's Therapy Dog program, first in Williamson County and this year expanded to Jackson County. This program brings a calming presence for witnesses and parties going through challenging court cases and makes them feel more comfortable in the courts. Both are active in the Court Navigator Network and are always looking for new ideas for improving access to justice in the Circuit.

- **Bob Glaves**, Executive Director, Chicago Bar Foundation

The Chicago Bar Foundation has a rich history with the ATJ Commission and is a nominating entity for one Commissioner. But Bob's dedication to access to justice started long before the ATJ Commission's creation, dating back to at least 1999 when he took the helm at the Chicago Bar Foundation (CBF). Since then, the CBF



has increased the amount of its annual grants and fundraising more than tenfold and has played a leading role in launching a number of groundbreaking access to justice initiatives. Perhaps one of Bob's greatest strengths is his ability to motivate people into action. His quiet confidence, his humility, and his gift of communication continue to keep and recruit people to make a difference.

- **Hon. Lisa Wilson**, 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit


Judge Wilson is active with many organizations and projects, including the Public Interest Law Initiative's 10th Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee, and works tirelessly to promote pro bono in central Illinois. She has been a part of CLE presentations and other speaking engagements centered around pro bono. In her courtroom, she regularly refers clients to the pro bono Help Desk in both Peoria and Tazewell County, providing litigants a fair chance to have representation when other judges may not encourage the opportunity nearly as much. She has also been a leader in remote court appearances and has helped train other judges about conducting effective remote proceedings.

- **Renata Stiehl**, Senior Division Attorney, Office of the Presiding Judge – Domestic Violence Division, Circuit Court of Cook County Renata was the first civil legal aid attorney to work full time in Cook County's Centralized Domestic Violence Courthouse when the doors opened in 2005, and she is now the Senior Division Attorney in the DV Division. In her current role, Renata created and is responsible for the new Litigant Services Advisors, DV trained court staff whose mission is to assist unrepresented survivors in preparing their petitions requesting emergency relief. In addition, she leads the team that manages the After Hours program, through which victims can reach a judge for a hearing to obtain an emergency order of protection nearly 24 hours per day. Currently more than 2,000 unrepresented litigants have taken advantage of this program.

On behalf of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice, we thank those mentioned above. We also are deeply grateful to all the judges, legal aid and pro bono lawyers, circuit clerks, court staff, self-help personnel, navigators, volunteers, AOIC staff, our partners, and all those who share the vision of a more fair and accessible court system.

## **2025 Language Access Updates – November 2024**

The court interpreter certification process is being reorganized, with changes taking effect on January 1, 2025. Candidates will now have the flexibility to choose whether to take the written exam before or after completing the two-day orientation. Previously, attending the orientation was required before taking the written exam. Both the orientation and written



exam must still be completed and passed to qualify to sit for the oral exam or oral proficiency interview (OPI).

The two-day orientation provides essential training on the interpreter's role, professional ethics, modes of interpreting used in court, legal terminology, and court protocols. The written exam, consisting of 135 multiple-choice questions and lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes, assesses English proficiency, legal terminology knowledge, understanding of court procedures, and ethical decision-making. A passing score remains 80% or higher.

In addition, the waiting period to retake the written exam will be reduced from six months to three months, while the six-month waiting period for the oral exam will remain unchanged. To support these updates, the written exam will be offered monthly throughout 2025. You can find the 2025 save-the-date schedule [here](#).

The Language Access Scholarship is now open, and applications are currently being accepted. This scholarship would cover the cost of the three-step certification process through the Illinois Language Access Program. This includes the two-day orientation (\$200), a written exam (\$50), and an oral exam (\$225) or an oral proficiency interview (OPI) (\$130) for languages where an oral exam is not available. Additionally, the scholarship covers 50% of the costs for retakes of the written exam, oral exam, or OPI.

Each year, the scholarship will be awarded to five individuals who meet the eligibility criteria: applicants must be at least 18 years old, reside in Illinois, and earn less than \$50,000 annually. Proof of income is required. The scholarship application is available [here](#).

Finally, following our request for proposals, the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts (AOIC) has chosen Interpretnet as the vendor for direct billing of remote interpreting services. If you are currently using Interpretnet, there will be no changes for your circuit. inLingo will continue direct billing our office until December 31. If you wish to continue using inLingo after that date, you may still do so; however, they will no longer be able to direct bill the AOIC. Instead, your circuit will receive the invoices directly, which your office will be responsible for paying. You may then use the interpreter reimbursement voucher for certified, qualified, and/or registered court interpreters listed on the AOIC Registry or another state registry, which can be found [here](#).

Please note that this reimbursement voucher can be used with any vendor or interpreter your circuit prefers, if the interpreters used are certified, qualified, and/or registered court interpreters listed on the [AOIC Registry](#) or another state registry.

The AOIC currently reimburses the full cost for certified and qualified court interpreters. The current reimbursement rate for registered status is \$39/hour.

For questions or more information about interpreter certification or reimbursement, please email Noor Alawawda at [nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov).

### **Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission Receives Justice Innovation Award – October 2024**

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) was honored with the Justice Innovation Award by the Law Center for Better Housing (LCBH) at Bringing Justice Home on October 17th at Buddy Guy's Legends in Chicago. Judge Jorge Ortiz (Lake County), Chair of the ATJ Commission, accepted the award on behalf of the project. The ATJ Commission was chosen as the award's recipient for its use of technology-driven solutions to enhance access to legal information as achieved through its standardized, plain language forms project.



Standardized forms are developed by the ATJ Commission's Forms Committee and its 13 drafting subcommittees. Chaired by Judge Michael Fiello (Jackson County) and Judge Catherine Schneider (Cook County), the Forms Committee and its Eviction Subcommittee spent years developing forms for use in the eviction process.

The Eviction Subcommittee drafted plain language forms from eviction complaint documents to eviction orders, including agreed orders that provide templates for agreements between landlords and tenants. Last year, after years of thoughtful development by the Eviction Subcommittee, the ATJ Commission released new eviction answer and eviction sealing forms, giving self-represented tenants access to the tools they need to respond to an eviction case filed against them and ask the court to remove an eviction case from the public record after it is completed.

"It's truly an honor to be recognized by the Law Center for Better Housing with their Justice Innovation Award," said Judge Schneider, co-chair of the Forms Committee. "As Co-Chair of the Forms Committee I have had the great pleasure of working with dedicated volunteers like Mark Swartz, the Executive Director of LCBH, who are experts in their practice areas, who know the needs of self-represented people and the requirements of the law so that we may create legally accurate, yet approachable and usable forms."

The ATJ Commission, established in 2012 by the Illinois Supreme Court, is charged with promoting, facilitating, and enhancing equal access to justice with an emphasis on access



to the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people. LCBH stands for renters' rights as the only legal aid organization in Chicago focused exclusively on housing justice issues. In 2023, LCBH served nearly 19,000 low- and moderate-income households through legal and supportive services while advocating for public policy initiatives to advance housing justice for all.


In attendance for the ATJ Commission were Avani Patel, Illinois Court Help Supervisor; Michael Zink, Eviction Forms Subcommittee; Mark Swartz, LCBH Executive Director and Eviction Forms Subcommittee Chair; Kathryn Hensley, Forms Supervisor; Judge Jorge Ortiz, Chair ATJ Commission; Alison Spanner, Director ATJ Division; Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, ATJ Division; Sarah Song, Eviction Forms Subcommittee; Judge Catherine Schneider, Co-chair Forms Committee; Judge Alison Conlon, ATJ Commissioner; Lillie Schneyer, Former Forms Team; Dorothy Ksiazek, ATJ Division. The physical awards are photos by renowned civil rights photographer and former director of HOPE Fair Housing Center, Bernie Kleina of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Chicago Freedom Movement in 1966.



## **New Illinois Supreme Court Forms Published to Enhance Access to Justice – September 2024**

*By Kathryn Hensley, Supervising Senior Program Manager, Access to Justice Division*

After numerous years of development, the Appellate Forms Subcommittee and the Forms Committee of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice are pleased to announce the publication of six form sets for filing an appeal with the Illinois Supreme Court. These form sets are: Petition for Leave to Appeal; Answer to Petition for Leave to



Appeal; Notice of Election; Appellant's Brief; Appellee's Brief; and Appellant's Reply Brief. The forms and instructions are available on the Illinois Courts [website](#).


In many communities, self-represented litigants (SRLs) face barriers when seeking to prosecute or defend an appeal due to complexity of the process, costs, and lack of information. Judge Jorge L. Ortiz, Chair of the Access to Justice Commission and 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court Judge, noted, "Self-represented litigants are asked to navigate complicated appellate rules and procedures that are unfamiliar to non-lawyers, and even lawyers who are not appellate attorneys. The release of the Supreme Court statewide forms and instructions will help make the appeals process more navigable for everyone and expands access to justice within all levels of our judicial system."

The Appellate Forms Subcommittee consists of a diverse group of court stakeholders throughout the state. The subcommittee is chaired by Joshua G. Vincent, a partner at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, and includes the Hon. Mary K. Rochford, 1st District Appellate Court Justice; Melissa Anderson, Chief Deputy Clerk, Illinois Supreme Court Clerk's Office; Amy Clark, Community Engagement Director, Illinois Legal Aid Online; Helen Doig, Senior Court Guide, Illinois Court Help; Tina Schillaci, Chief Deputy Clerk, 1<sup>st</sup> District Appellate Court; and Susan Simone, Director of Litigation and Advocacy, Land of Lincoln Legal Aid.

"There are incidental benefits from our subcommittee's long-term collaboration," Vincent said. "We have all learned something about each other's experiences, whether it's the direct pro bono representation of those who can't afford an attorney to the daily needs and challenges the state's dedicated court professionals face when trying to help SRLs. So, it's been a great learning experience for all of us."

Like all forms published by the ATJ Commission, the new Illinois Supreme Court forms are in plain language and are fillable PDFs. Statewide standardized forms not only streamline the legal process, but also play a vital role in promoting fairness and equity within the justice system.

"Navigating the appellate process, and particularly the procedures for seeking supreme court review, is a daunting task for SRLs," Vincent said. "Our subcommittee takes great pride in the completion of these new form sets, which will not only help ensure access to justice, but engender greater trust in the judicial system."





## Illinois contingent attends SRLN Conference – September 2024


*By Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division, AOIC*



Twenty-three members of the Illinois court and legal community attended the Self-Represented Litigation Network (SRLN) conference in Salt Lake City, Utah from September 18-21, 2024. This included five staff of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC), representatives from five judicial circuits, the Chicago Bar Foundation, Illinois Bar Foundation, and more.

SRLN is a network of justice system professionals aiming for 100% access to civil justice. The network supports professionals focused on the question of how best to reform ALL aspects of the legal system (courts, legal aid, the bar, and non-legal partners) so that SRLs experience the courts (and indeed the legal system) as a consumer-oriented environment guided by the principles of equal protection and due process. The conference offered opportunities to network and learn from other states about programs and solutions they are implementing, and allowed us to share the incredible work being done in Illinois.

Stacey Weiler from the Illinois Bar Foundation presented “Nonlawyer Navigators in State Courts: An Update from the Field” which highlighted the Illinois JusticeCorps program. Avani Patel, AOIC presented on “Self-Help Platforms: Empowering People and Providing Baseline Access to Justice,” which highlighted Illinois Court Help. There was a session about the Illinois partnership with Suffolk Law Lab that highlighted a guided interview integrated with e-filing. Jill Roberts, AOIC and Roya Samarghandi, Chicago Bar Foundation presented “Building Connected Ecosystems of Resources for Self-Represented Litigants,” which highlighted the Safe Harbor Policy and some programs that utilize it, like the Court



Library Access Centers. Kathryn Hensley and Sarah Song, AOIC presented “Listening to Their Voices: Getting Community-Based Feedback for Courts” highlighting forms user testing and community trust listening session projects.

Brenda Sprague, Executive Assistant to the Chief First Circuit Judge said “I believe [Illinois] is so advanced in self-help because of the work [the ATJ Commission] has done! Some state offices are just getting started [...] it's clear to understand how much the Illinois Access to Justice team has accomplished!” The ATJ Commission staff also saw how far we have to go, and we return to Illinois with renewed energy and ideas for improving access to justice in Illinois. One plenary speaker said “no matter what you do, it will not be enough AND it will be vitally important.” The ATJ Commission staff will keep this charge in mind as we continue to set strategic goals and priorities in order to make important, incremental improvements to our court system.


### **Access to Justice Improvement Grant Awards Break the \$2 Million Mark – August 2024**

*By Jill E. Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division*

First issued in late 2017, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) has now awarded a total of \$2 million in grant funds to improve access to justice and services for self-represented litigants (SRLs) across the state.

Thousands of litigants appear in the Illinois courts without a lawyer every year. The growing number of SRLs in court is not unique to any one circuit, county, or case type. The ATJ Commission and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts Access to Justice Division (ATJ Division) recognize, given the size and diversity of Illinois, that local partners are critical to fully understand and address the needs of the SRL population. For these reasons, the ATJ Commission created a grant program to increase local partnerships, the Access to Justice Improvement Grant.

In addition to distributing grant funds, local court staff also participate in a statewide Court Navigator Network (Network) to receive training and share ideas about improving access to justice. This year, the Network met August 19-21 via Zoom for orientation and covered topics such as an Illinois courts overview, information vs. legal advice, and plain language. The Network will continue to receive training throughout the year as well as have opportunities to collaborate and share resources with their counterparts across the state. If you are interested in joining the Network, please email Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division at [jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov).



Although there are Network members from every Judicial Circuit, here is the list of this year's newly awarded ATJ Improvement grant recipients and their grant projects:

- First Judicial Circuit:
  - *Brenda Sprague, Administrative Assistant to the Chief Judge, will serve all nine counties in the circuit to conduct an access to justice conference, launch a therapy dog program in Jackson County, expand the Lawyer in the Library program to three new locations, attend the SRLN conference, and support the Illinois JusticeCorps fellow with circuit-wide mileage costs.*
  - *Massac County Circuit Clerk Marcus Grace will buy paper, ink, and printers to print statewide forms.*
  - *Saline County Circuit Clerk's Office staff Ashley Bryant will implement a text message reminder program and add a new computer space for SRLs.*
  - *Union County Circuit Clerk Keri Clark will expand the Counsel in the Courthouse program, attend the SRLN Conference, and pay for copier, texting, supplies, and app maintenance.*
- Second Judicial Circuit: Erica Summers, Administrative Assistant, maintain the Lawyer in the Library program to in four counties and expand to one new county.
- Third Judicial Circuit: received two grant awards for:
  - *Law Librarian Angela Wille to continue domestic violence services and outreach, design and print literature for SRLs, obtain digital library materials, provide SRL convenience items, cover GAL and drug testing costs, and purchase a new copier.*
  - *Madison County Circuit Clerk's Office employee Susan Faulkner to continue previous resources (filing forms, text message reminders, Ad Gator digital screens, etc.).*
- Fourth Judicial Circuit:
  - *Trial Court Administrator Jaime Warren will facilitate and support the Illinois JusticeCorps member's travel throughout the circuit.*
  - *Marion County Circuit Clerk Tiffany Schicker will improve signage inside and outside the courthouse.*
- Fifth Judicial Circuit:
  - *Clark County Circuit Clerk Ami Shaw will rework the public access terminal area for court patrons.*
  - *Cumberland County Circuit Clerk Rhonda Wilson will create a work station that is accessible to all.*

- Sixth Judicial Circuit: Champaign County Circuit Clerk Susan McGrath will address communication barriers, provide public Westlaw access, and get a new laptop for the Self-Help Center.
- Eighth Judicial Circuit: Court Administrator Molly Caughlan will create SRL computer stations in each courthouse and provide cell phone locker storage.
- Ninth Judicial Circuit:
  - *Hancock County Circuit Clerk Keara Weber will provide printed forms for SRLs.*
  - *Trial Court Administrator Sandy Redington will update the existing self-help station, create an additional station, provide a children's area and baby changing stations, and office supplies in Henderson County.*
- Tenth Judicial Circuit:
  - *Jennifer Shadid, CFO, will oversee the hiring of a staff member in the Peoria Law Library and Self-Help Center.*
  - *Court Administrator Tricia Richmond will improve help staff the library and self-help center in Tazewell County.*
- Eleventh Judicial Circuit: Library Staff Mary Sellmyer will obtain iPads for language access, cell phone lockers, and baby changing stations for McLean County.
- Twelfth Judicial Circuit: Court Staff Anne Swanson will continue facilitating a Lawyer in the Library program for small claims, child support/custody, and expungement.
- Thirteenth Judicial Circuit:
  - *Bureau County Circuit Clerk Dawn Reglin will print forms, utilize lobby docket, run a mobile app, use a text message reminder program, and update the SRL filing stations.*
  - *LaSalle County Circuit Clerk staff Diane Lebeau-Gerber will expand the offerings of the self-help center and SRL resources and use digital monitors with docket information.*
  - *Trial Court Administrator Lori Wakeman will create a self-represented litigant help center with staff and to compensate court-appointed mediators in SRL involved cases in LaSalle County.*
- Fifteenth Judicial Circuit: Stephenson County Circuit Clerk Shanelle Bardell will obtain monitors for the daily docket and print statewide forms sets.
- Sixteenth Judicial Circuit: Law Librarian Halle Eichert continue Lawyer in the Library and Lawyer in the Lobby programs and improve materials for SRLs.
- Seventeenth Judicial Circuit: Deputy TCA Kim Ackmann will obtain software for legal dictation, update public access terminals and digital docket signage in Winnebago and create public access terminals in Boone.
- Eighteenth Judicial Circuit:

- *DuPage County Circuit Clerk's office staff Jesse Goehl will continue the text message reminder program and digital monitors, and to create and deploy a customer satisfaction survey.*
  - *Court staff Alyssa Fortino will fund the Family Engagement Mediation Program with CASA.*
- Nineteenth Judicial Circuit: Beth Bogie will continue the early resolution program for divorces (in partnership with Prairie State Legal Services) and continue an online chat function on the court's website.
- Twentieth Judicial Circuit: St. Clair County Law Librarian Karina Santos will enhance services in the Law Library for an interactive Zoom room and additional private workstations.
- Twenty-First Judicial Circuit: Trial Court Administrator Lori Wolf and Administrative Assistant to the Chief Judge Heather Ruel will continue to provide Westlaw access for SRLs and order OP carbonless forms.
- Twenty-Third Judicial Circuit: Marilyn Stromborg and Benji Meier from the DeKalb County Circuit Clerk's Office, will expand the offerings of the self-help center by expanding technology throughout the courthouse, continuing to support the SHC, expand partnerships, and evaluate equipment/supplies.
- Twenty-Fourth Judicial Circuit:
  - *Monroe County Circuit Clerk's office staff member Sheila Jerls will create workspace for SRLs.*
  - *Trial Court Administrator Jeff Twardowski and Perry County Circuit Clerk Kim Kellerman will enhance court facilities with office furniture and technology and self-help center supplies.*
  - *Randolph County Circuit Clerk Julie Carnahan will improve the self-help center with Westlaw and other software, supplies, and courthouse seating.*
  - *Trial Court Administrator Jeff Twardowski and Administrative Assistant to the Chief Judge Lynn Combs will add additional monitors and technology equipment, office chairs, and software to the self-help center.*
- Circuit Court of Cook County:
  - *Circuit Clerk's Offices staff Sam Williams will improve the self-help center and will attend the SRLN conference.*
  - *Office of the Chief Judge's staff Lanice Mitchell will improve the current space of the Resource Center for People without Lawyers at the Daley Center.*
  - *District 3 – Rolling Meadows: will fund an advice desk for SRL court calls for Judge Rossanna Fernandez with Legal Aid Society.*



- *District 4 - Maywood: Audrey Garner will continue to oversee a partnership with Chicago Volunteer Legal Services for a help desk for Judge Tzinberg's court call.*

Please join us in congratulating all ATJ Commission grant recipients and encouraging their efforts to make Illinois courts better, easier, and more accessible for self-represented litigants. If you have any questions or are interested in joining the Network, please email Jill Roberts at [jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov).

### **Illinois Court Help: Celebrating Growth and Welcoming New Court Guides – Aug. 2024**



Illinois Court Help recently marked its third anniversary with an impressive record of aiding over 50,000 court users since its launch in May 2021. This groundbreaking program continues to be a crucial resource for court users navigating the complexities of the legal system across Illinois. In celebrating this milestone, Illinois Court Help proudly welcomes three new Court Guides: Frances, Erik, and Daniel.

#### **Meet the new Court Guides**

##### **Q: What drew you to become a Court Guide with Illinois Court Help?**

**Frances:** *"I was (and still am) excited for this opportunity to join a wonderful team and be able to contribute towards the common goal of guiding court users through the oftentimes daunting and complicated court system. I had seen the struggles that self-represented litigants faced firsthand in the county that I previously worked in, and my goal was always to attempt to improve their experiences with the local circuit court, so the idea that I could make a similar impact on a statewide level was too alluring to pass up! This role will give me the chance to make a difference on a larger scale and contribute to the growth of this relatively newer program all while allowing me to spend more time with my family, which includes a toddler and a baby on the way."*

**Q: What aspect of being a Court Guide excites you the most?**

**Daniel:** *“I’m most excited for the opportunity to more directly work with court users, particularly self-represented litigants. By working with these users, I feel that I am able to take a more active role in the Illinois Courts and our Access to Justice initiatives. As a new Illinois Court Help Guide, I’m also excited to learn and develop new ways to expand court programs in the future.”*

**Q: How do you see your background contributing to your role as a Court Guide?**

**Erik:** *“My work in a circuit clerk’s office, as well as the years I spent in a courtroom, give me a unique perspective in knowing exactly what a Court user will be going through. Not only the processes and legal information, but also what to expect when physically appearing in a courtroom or joining remotely. I’ve been the “other side”, so to speak, so I’m also very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the court system in general. Court is often a terrifying and nerve-wracking experience. Being able to offer at least a glimpse of what to expect can, I think, give some much-needed reassurance.”*

**A bright future ahead**

With Frances, Erik, and Daniel’s unique perspectives and expertise, Illinois Court Help is better equipped to support and guide even more court users throughout Illinois. For assistance, call or text message 833-411-1121 or visit [ilcourthelp.gov](https://ilcourthelp.gov) to send a message.