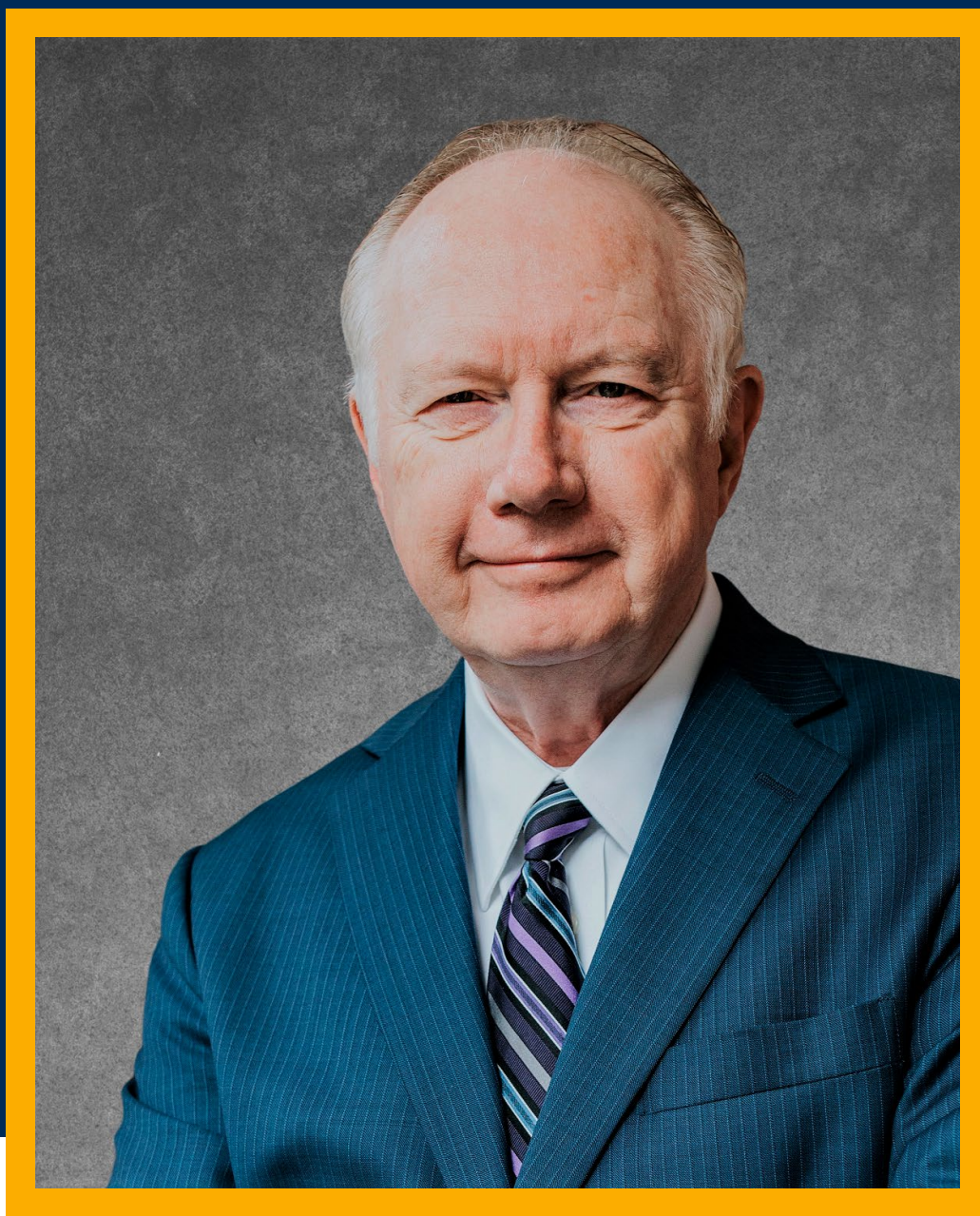


Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice
Special Newsletter Honoring

Justice Thomas L. Kilbride

MARCH 2021



ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT COMMISSION

ACCESS

TO JUSTICE

EDUCATION. SUPPORT. EMPOWERMENT.



**The Illinois Supreme
Court Commission on
Access to Justice**

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Supreme Court Liaison

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We invite you to enjoy this special newsletter celebrating Justice Thomas L. Kilbride and honoring his lasting impact on our court system. You will find testaments and reflections from his former Illinois Supreme Court colleagues, past and present members of the Access to Justice Commission, and judges, clerks, lawyers, court staff, and others who have worked with Justice Kilbride and shared his admirable fervor for improving accessibility and fairness. Justice Kilbride has paved the way in our state for enhancing access to justice. We are forever indebted to him and immensely thankful.

A History of Support

Throughout his career, Justice Kilbride tirelessly labored on behalf of those facing legal issues. As a legal aid attorney with Prairie State Legal Services, he represented and assisted low-income litigants. He then worked for a mid-sized law firm, and finally as a solo practitioner for nearly two decades. During this period, he also generously dedicated his time to volunteer endeavors throughout the Rock Island area.

Justice Kilbride was elected to the Illinois Supreme Court in 2000 and elected Chief Justice by his colleagues in 2010. As Chief Justice, he spearheaded efforts to increase access to the court system for all court patrons. To that end, in June of 2012, under his leadership, the Supreme Court established the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (Commission). Justice Kilbride served as the Commission’s liaison to the Supreme Court and was its leader in developing improvements, resources, and programs within the judicial system with the goal of fairness and equity.

In the 9 years since its creation, the Commission has taken groundbreaking steps towards achieving equitable justice for all. Two important cornerstones of the Commission’s work include initiatives on language access and the publication of plain language standardized forms. The Commission also drafted the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Plain Language, the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Assistance to Court Patrons, and the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Remote Court Appearances in Civil Proceedings.

In furtherance of Justice Kilbride’s goal, the Commission also created the Court Navigator Network, the first ever statewide network of court personnel dedicated to addressing issues affecting self-represented litigants. Under his tenure, the Commission spearheaded other innovative programs including video remote interpreting, early resolution programs, online dispute resolution programs, and the state’s first civil appellate help desk. With Justice Kilbride’s assistance, the Commission held the Law Student Leaders Access to Justice Summit—a day focused on educating and inspiring future leaders about equalizing access to our judicial system in their respective career paths. The Commission has additionally lent its support to JusticeCorps, limited scope representation, and remote access endeavors.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without Justice Kilbride’s continued efforts, support, and dedication to the mission of access to justice. Justice Kilbride has undoubtedly paved the way for a more fair, just, and equitable Illinois court system, and we cannot thank him enough for all that he has done.



‘Equal Justice for All’ is what comes to mind when

I think of Access to Justice and Justice Kilbride. By championing formation of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice, Justice Kilbride laid ground work for changes within the Illinois civil justice system to provide greater equality for poor and vulnerable Court users. He demonstrated unwavering advocacy and support for equal access to justice. As a result, many disadvantaged litigants are being afforded fair and equal treatment, and access to justice under the law. Justice Kilbride is a role model for lawyers and judiciary, and is a hero in the Illinois legal community.

Carolyn Clift

CO-CHAIR OF COMMUNITY TRUST
COMMITTEE, ATJ COMMISSIONER

I was one of the original members of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice and had the honor of working closely with the driving force behind the Commission, Justice Thomas Kilbride. To me, Justice Kilbride’s name will always be synonymous with the Commission. His passion for the ideals of the Commission, to ensure that justice was available to all, was remarkable and inspiring. I don’t believe the Commission would’ve existed without Justice Kilbride’s dedication and devotion. His legacy will be the accomplishments of the Commission both as of today and into the future. We all owe Justice Kilbride a debt of gratitude for his foresight and commitment to the ideal that justice belongs not just to the privileged, but to all.

Timothy Kelly

FORMER ATJ COMMISSIONER



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

CHAMBERS OF
CHIEF JUSTICE ANNE M. BURKE

Dear Tom:

It gives me great pleasure to take this opportunity to extend to you my deep gratitude for your many years of dedicated service to the Court and to the people of this state, particularly, for your many contributions to the cause of access to justice in Illinois.

Tom, in the nearly 15 years that we were colleagues on the Court, I witnessed how passionately you believed in making the court system more accessible to litigants who could not afford legal representation. In 2012, while serving as Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, you were the driving force behind the creation of the Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice. Over the past nine years, the Commission has brought about changes to our legal system that have increasingly improved access to justice for all citizens. In addition, in 2020, the Access to Justice Commission played a vital role in making remote access to the courts more available, assisting both the judicial system and litigants to navigate through the pandemic. It was also your support of the “JusticeCorps” initiative, that allowed hundreds of volunteers to receive training to assist self-represented litigants.

Tom, I know the words, “with liberty and justice for all,” hold great meaning for you. Please know that I will be forever grateful for your friendship, for your guidance, and for everything you have done throughout your distinguished legal career to help make those words a reality for every citizen of this great State of Illinois.

Sincerely,

Anne M. Burke

CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS



Dear Justice Kilbride:

In June 2012, under your leadership and vision, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice began its efforts to develop programs which would increase access to the courthouses of our state and make the judicial process more fair and far less onerous to all court users, particularly the poor and the vulnerable. At that time you said: *“The purpose [of the Commission] is to make access to justice a high priority for everyone in the legal system. This includes judges, clerks, attorneys, other court personnel, and even our law schools.”* Press Release, Supreme Court of Illinois, Chief Justice Kilbride and the Illinois Supreme Court Announce New Initiative to Ease Access to Courts (June 13, 2012).

You have been a tireless advocate for eliminating the barriers which prevent equal access to our courts. You called on all of us to meet the challenges posed by this endeavor and encouraged us to roll up our sleeves and get to work. It was an impassioned call to action, and you were always there for guidance, advice, and encouragement. From the start, we believed in you and in your hope for a fair and accessible court system.

It has been a true honor to have followed you on this quest to achieve access to justice and a true privilege to have had your friendship, wise counsel, and insight. You are truly inspirational. On behalf of the Commission and our many partners, I promise you that we will continue to carry on your mission and strive to fulfill your dream.

May the road rise up to meet you and the wind be always at your back.

Sincerely,

Mary K. Rochford

CHAIR OF ATJ COMMISSION



The Chicago Bar Foundation
321 South Plymouth Court, Suite 3B
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On behalf of everyone associated with The Chicago Bar Foundation, I am proud to submit this letter as part of the Commission's tribute to Justice Kilbride.

Justice Kilbride led by example in his commitment to access to justice throughout his tenure on the Illinois Supreme Court, and he played an integral role in taking the Judicial Branch in Illinois from being a laggard on these issues twenty years ago to being a national leader today.

Justice Kilbride's leadership is responsible for so many fundamental parts of our access to justice landscape that we now take for granted today--starting with the Commission itself--that it would be hard to name them all. Just a few noteworthy examples include the growing body of statewide standardized court forms, the model policies and infrastructure for language access in the courts, the Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network, and the Access to Justice Division in the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, which grew out of the Commission's early good work during his tenure as Chief Justice.

Throughout his time on the Supreme Court, Justice Kilbride was a champion for pro bono, legal aid, and access to justice in the courts, the organized bar, our state's law schools, and beyond. He rarely missed a major bar or legal aid event anywhere in the state (and always had a good reason those rare times he did), which sent such a powerful message to the lawyers and other professionals who are on the front lines of the day-to-day work that makes access to justice a reality throughout Illinois.

While we still have a long way to go to fulfill our nation's promise of equal access to justice, Justice Kilbride fundamentally changed our legal system in Illinois for the better in his time on the Court and left a legacy that continues to inspire us all.

Sincerely,

Bob Glaves

CHICAGO BAR FOUNDATION
APPOINTING BODY OF THE ATJ COMMISSION



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

CHAMBERS OF
JUSTICE DAVID K. OVERSTREET

Dear Justice Kilbride,

Thank you for your honorable service and outstanding leadership on the Supreme Court of Illinois over the past twenty years. Your tenure as Chief Justice from 2010-2013 brought about several significant improvements to our justice system, none of which were more critical than the establishment of the Access to Justice Commission in 2012.

There can be no justice unless all have access to that justice, including those who are without means and those who are the most vulnerable in our society. You have worked tirelessly to make sure all have fair and equitable access to justice in Illinois.

There is no greater honor and responsibility I have as I begin my tenure on the Court than to follow you and serve as liaison to the Access to Justice Commission. The work continues and I will never forget your indispensable contributions to the effort.

Very truly yours,

Justice David K. Overstreet
ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



When Justice Kilbride was elected to the Supreme Court, it was like a member of my family had been elected. This is because Justice Kilbride had been a legal aid lawyer and I was then a legal aid lawyer. I knew his legal aid experience would allow him to bring something new and positive to the Supreme Court. I did not expect that his tenure would result in a fundamental change in access to justice in Illinois, but his initiative to create the Commission on Access to Justice did just that. The Commission has used the work of hundreds of volunteers to make our justice system better. As one of the original commissioners and as the current co-chair of the Forms Committee of the Commission, I have been a part of the changes the Commission has made. As an associate circuit court judge, I see first-hand how those changes impact the court system on a daily basis. It brings a smile to my face each time a self-represented litigant is before me and has used the state-wide approved forms to get their case before the court or be able to participate in a case filed against them. Although we have not yet ensured equal access for everyone, we treat the task of getting there seriously and continue to work toward that goal. That is Justice Kilbride's legacy and one could not wish for a better one. On behalf of all the former and current legal aid lawyers, who struggled and continue to struggle with limited funding and limited staff to try to provide access to the poor, thank you Justice Kilbride for making our work the work of the Supreme Court.

Judge Michael Fiello
CO-CHAIR OF FORMS COMMITTEE
FORMER ATJ COMMISSIONER

DANIELLE HIRSCH

I am so delighted to be included in this issue thanking Justice Kilbride for his service on the Illinois Supreme Court. From the start of his legal career at Prairie State Legal Services, Justice Kilbride dedicated his career to ensure that people disadvantaged economically are not disadvantaged legally; and he recognized that legal decisions alone cannot secure and maintain justice.

During his tenure on the Illinois Supreme Court, he dedicated tremendous time and energy to expanding civil access to justice. Justice Kilbride was the driving force behind the creation of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission), and over the past ten years, the ATJ Commission has achieved far-ranging and significant results, from expanded limited scope representation for people with modest means; numerous pro bono innovations; new self-help resources, including standardized plain language forms, to help people without lawyers engage with the courts; better language access plans to provide language access services to court patrons who are limited English proficient; and so much more.

On a personal note, I am totally indebted to Justice Kilbride. It is impossible to count all the ways that he has helped me in my career. Most notably, Justice Kilbride is the person who recruited me to work for the ATJ Commission, where I got to work together with him and many other incredible people to engage in meaningful access to justice policy work.

Justice Kilbride is a deeply practical person. He has always believed in “doing,” as the long list of ATJ Commission accomplishments reflects. Justice Kilbride has never been one to linger in celebration: he has always focused on the next opportunity to serve vulnerable people in Illinois, and he is always eager to get moving to it. In that spirit, I am sure he will continue to work to advance access to justice in whatever he chooses to do next.

Go raibh míle maith agat; may you have a thousand good things, Justice Kilbride!

Danielle Hirsch

FORMER ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, ACCESS TO JUSTICE DIVISION,
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS COURTS



State of Illinois
Circuit Court of Cook County
Domestic Relations Division

Dear Justice Kilbride:

What an honor it is to share my reflections on your great accomplishments with the Access to Justice Commission. Your establishment of this Commission has had an immeasurable impact on the ability of Illinoisans to meaningfully access the court system, particularly those who are self-represented or limited English proficient. Rather than requiring those we serve to adapt to us, you shared your vision of us adapting to those we serve. At the outset, you crafted a variegated group of private practitioners, judges, professors, legal aid representatives and other key players to share their perspectives on issues facing vulnerable litigants. While bringing diverse voices into the conversation and educating the legal community on the shifting landscape of the court system, the Commission, under your leadership, propelled us as a whole to make realistic yet transformative changes to how we operate.

Not only has the Commission's work helped our community's litigants, but it has had great impact on the efficiency of the court. As Presiding Judge of the Cook County Circuit Court's Domestic Relations Division, I have been uniquely positioned to receive feedback on the daily challenges of self-represented and limited English proficient litigants in divorce and parentage cases, from the litigants themselves and those who interact with them. As you know, my office and other courthouse staff spend great amounts of time explaining proper procedure, connecting litigants with resources and pulling the correct court forms. The Commission's work on translating procedure into plain language, revising complicated procedural requirements, implementing Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators and standardizing court forms has undoubtedly eased the strain on our hardworking judges and staff.

I am privileged to have been a part of the Commission from its inception, working alongside Justice Liu to spearhead the Language Access Program with a focus on better supporting those with limited English proficiency. We were able to finalize a clear policy for interpreters identifying who is eligible for interpreter services, establishing a certification system, and providing standardized guidance on utilizing interpreter services. We also ensured the interpreters used by our litigants are held to a certain standard through the institution of the Illinois Supreme Court Code of Interpreter Ethics.

Because of this work under the Commission's direction, Illinois courts are able to provide litigants with access to certified interpreters across 22 different languages, including American Sign Language.

Sincerely,

Grace G. Dickler

CO-CHAIR OF LANGUAGE ACCESS COMMITTEE

Judge Lloyd A. Karmeier
Nashville, Illinois 62263

I am pleased to join this tribute to Justice Kilbride in recognition of the critical role he played in establishing the Access to Justice Commission and his unwavering commitment to ensuring that our system of civil justice is accessible to all who need it.

Even before the onset of the pandemic, our legal system, like our society and economy at large, had increasingly become one of “haves” and “have nots.” In some of our courtrooms, over 90% of litigants were self-represented. In a majority of our circuits, 70% or more of the litigants in civil cases have no lawyer to help them. This disparity is incompatible with our most basic notions of justice and fair play.

To help level the playing field, the Illinois Supreme Court established the Access to Justice Commission in 2012 under the leadership of then Chief Justice Kilbride. In the years that followed, the Commission and the Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC ATJ Division) have successfully instituted a broad range of innovative and highly successful programs to assist self-represented litigants with accessing our courts; support legal aid and pro bono lawyers in their representation of their clients; and provide court personnel with training and resources to better handle the special challenges presented when parties come to court without the help of a lawyer.

The significance of these measures cannot be underestimated. The ground-breaking steps taken by the Access to Justice Commission have brought us closer to fulfilling the promise of equal justice under the law than at any time in our history. Justice Kilbride’s vision and personal commitment are directly responsible for this remarkable achievement. No judge could have left a greater legacy.

Very truly yours,

Lloyd A. Karmeier

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE (RET.)



Supreme Court of Illinois
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS COURTS

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Justice Kilbride’s impact on Access to Justice in Illinois.

I had the good fortune of serving as AOIC Chief Legal Counsel and later as Deputy Director during the years that Justice Kilbride served as Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court. As such, I was able to see firsthand how Justice Kilbride’s leadership in the Supreme Court’s creation of the Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice in 2012 was instrumental in raising statewide awareness as to the barriers that vulnerable litigants face in our court system and, in turn, ensuring that issues of access are fully understood and considered by all court stakeholders - judges, clerks, court staff, and attorneys.

By creating a better understanding of these barriers, self-represented litigants become something more than an additional challenge to judicial administration. Rather, the Commission’s work highlights and informs all of us in the court system about self-represented litigants as court customers - how they view the justice system and how they navigate court processes as they seek resolution for legal problems in a complex system that was developed for lawyers, by lawyers.

Justice Kilbride and the Supreme Court’s support of the Commission ensures judicial branch accountability and commitment to enhancing the experience of each person participating in the court process, whether they are represented by counsel or not, and this work has incorporated judges, clerks, court staff, and attorneys into the solution. One such example of a key collaborative effort among the various court stakeholders is the development of over 30 plain language legal forms in many areas of law. A second example is the demonstrated commitment in many circuits with complying with the Court’s Language Access Policy by providing certified language interpreters to limited English proficient litigants in more court proceedings than ever before.

It has been my privilege to support the work of the Commission and I applaud the decision of former AOIC Director Michael J. Tardy to bring the staffing of the Commission into the AOIC with the creation of the Access to Justice Division. In line with Director Tardy’s vision, the Division has fully integrated access to justice into the Court’s efforts and has both benefited – and benefited from - the expertise, structure, and resources within all AOIC Divisions.

The honor of working with Justice Kilbride on these issues and many more continued during my tenure as Director. While he is indeed missed, our courts will continue to build upon the foundation he laid and his commitment to justice will be felt by court stakeholders and litigants for many years to come. It is with enormous gratitude that I wish Justice Kilbride well on whatever comes next.

Sincerely,

Marcia M. Meis

DIRECTOR, ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS COURTS



The people of Illinois were fortunate to have Justice Kilbride’s focused leadership on many issues—and chief among them the issue of access to justice and ultimately the creation of the Access to Justice Commission. His goal was to develop a commission dedicated to active and impactful work to improve the ability of all people—and particularly those in need—to gain access to the courts to vindicate their rights. We are all grateful for his leadership and proud to be part of the commission’s work.

Linda Coberly

CHAIR OF RULES AND POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE
ATJ COMMISSIONER

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, with the support of his colleagues on the Supreme Court of Illinois, brought the need to better achieve Access to Justice to the attention the of Legal Community and the General Public in Illinois in 2012 through the establishment of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice.

The establishment of the Commission on Access to Justice was certainly an important accomplishment. However, I believe that Justice Kilbride’s legacy with regard to Access to Justice will be his deep and ongoing personal commitment and involvement in the development and the implementation of each and every aspect of the Access to Justice initiative which he brought to Illinois.

I had the privilege of serving on the Commission on Access to Justice for six years from its inception in June of 2012 until June of 2018. Justice Kilbride’s personal devotion towards achieving the goals of Access to Justice was an inspiration to me and to the others involved in the work of the Commission. Justice Kilbride was in attendance and participated in almost every conference call or in-person meeting of the Commission and many other Commission events.

Justice Kilbride has been a very effective motivator for all of those working to promote and improve Access to Justice in Illinois. At the Commission meetings, he would ask probing questions, encourage innovative solutions and always maintained a positive attitude towards achieving our goals. It was always clear to me that Justice Kilbride’s commitment to Access to Justice was not just for the sake of another accomplishment to be listed in his biography. His commitment to Access to Justice is a continuation of his passion to achieve access to equal justice for all who seek redress or protection in our Court System.

Respectfully Submitted by

Michael J. Sullivan

FORMER ATJ COMMISSIONER



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

CHAMBERS OF JUSTICE MICHAEL J. BURKE

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas Kilbride saw the need to make the Illinois civil justice system more accessible to individuals coming to court without attorneys or with limited English language proficiency. Under then Chief Justice Kilbride’s leadership, the court’s access to justice initiative resulted in the formation of the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission and an Access to Justice Division within the Administrative Office of the Illinois Court, which supports the work of the Commission.

This effort has resulted in the institution of language access programs, the development of materials and resources for self-represented litigants, and a constant awareness of how we can better accommodate all those who come in contact with the judicial system. The innovative work of the Commission is a testament to Justice Kilbride’s praiseworthy vision of ensuring equal access to justice in our courts.

Respectfully,

Justice Michael J. Burke

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



When I think of Justice Kilbride, I think of the passion he displayed and the work he put forth in making Access to Justice a reality. He is the main reason that this needed mechanism became a reality. There could be no better legacy for a person to have and this one is Justice Kilbride’s!

Kelly Cheesman

FORMER ATJ COMMISSIONER

Justice Kilbride’s leadership and steadfast commitment to access to justice has been instrumental to the success of Illinois JutsiceCorps. With his support, and that of the Commission on Access to Justice, the program has expanded statewide, leveraged over \$300,000 in federal funding each year and helped countless self-represented litigants while inspiring young people from all backgrounds to join the effort to make the legal system more equitable for all.

Stacey Weiler

ILLINOIS BAR FOUNDATION
APPOINTING BODY OF THE
ATJ COMMISSION

“Justice Thomas Kilbride” – the name packs a wallop! Three constituent parts to the name: I will discuss them in reverse order.

“Kilbride” – the family name. “Family” is integral to who Justice Thomas Kilbride is. I have known Tom Kilbride for more than ten years now, and never – not once – in our hundreds of conversations did he fail to talk about his family—or ask about mine. Family is at Tom Kilbride’s core. His love and pride for his wife, Mary, his cherished mother, Colleen, his three incredible daughters, and his beloved grandchildren, are central to the DNA of Tom Kilbride.

“Thomas” – his first name, but I’m not sure it really exists, because (as you know) everyone calls him “Tom.” It doesn’t matter to whom you speak. It can be judges, deputy sheriffs, clerks, secretaries, other administrative staff members, lawyers, waiters, waitresses, janitors, doormen: everyone calls him “Tom,” because that is who he is. If there is a more sincere, decent, and down-to-Earth person, I have not met him or her. I have traveled the State with Tom Kilbride, attended conferences with him, gone to ballgames, and seen him interact with people from every walk of life. Always, he would go out of his way to introduce himself to people – no matter what their station in life. And he always introduced himself as “Tom,” never as “Justice,” and never as “Thomas.” Just Tom, like your friend next door. His interest in all people, his humility, and his basic decency – are part of the essence of Justice Tom Kilbride.

And then there is “justice.” Not the title with the capital “J,” but the ideal—“justice”—that we all strive for. Never once have I seen Tom Kilbride exalt his position or his title but, in everything I’ve seen, Tom represents the concept of “justice.” Plato wrote, “Of all the things of a man’s soul which he has within him, justice is the greatest good and injustice the greatest evil.” No words could better describe Tom Kilbride—for “justice” is within his soul.



A number of years ago, then-Chief Justice Tom Kilbride called me to ask if I would serve as the first chair of the Supreme Court’s Commission on Access to Justice. In making the request, Tom said essentially the following: “I want to solve problems. I want to improve the system. I want to make things fairer for people who don’t have lawyers. I want action. I don’t want a Commission that spends a year or two studying issues and then writing a report that sits on people’s bookshelves. I want a Commission that will focus on the nuts-and-bolts problems of equal access to justice for the disadvantaged in our society and propose solutions.” Those were his marching orders, and that is what the first Commission on Access to Justice tried to do. At every step of the way, Tom Kilbride lived up to his words and his commitments. Among many other things, Tom championed the standardization of court forms in language that “regular” people could understand, and he pushed for the translation of those forms into languages other than English. At every turn, Tom sought financial resources to address inequities in our system, and he made never-ending efforts to make the Illinois legal system a fairer and more equal one. Concern for inequalities, commitment to make the system as fair and accessible as possible, and a “soul” with justice in it: that is who Tom Kilbride is.

Sadly, voters have deprived us of Tom’s place on the Court, but “justice” Tom Kilbride will always be the living personification of our continuing effort to make “equal justice under the law” more than mere words on a building.

Sending warm regards and best wishes to all,

Jeff Colman

FORMER CHAIR OF ATJ COMMISSION



The beginning of Justice Kilbride’s tenure as Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court coincided with an ever-increasing number of parties in civil cases being self-represented. These individuals, most of whom were poor and unable to hire a lawyer, were ill-equipped to represent themselves within a complicated legal system. Unjust results inevitably followed. Recognizing the severity of the problem, the Illinois Supreme Court, with Chief Justice Kilbride’s vision and leadership, established the Access to Justice Commission which, in the years since, has helped thousands of residents successfully navigate the Illinois civil court system. We owe Justice Kilbride, a champion of “access to justice,” a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Justice Thomas M. Harris
ATJ COMMISSIONER

It is my distinct honor to recognize the contributions of our friend and colleague Justice Kilbride to the principles of access to justice in Illinois. There is no doubt that a large number of Illinoisans find themselves without legal assistance to help them with their potentially life-altering legal problems. Justice Kilbride recognized early on that the legal aid and pro bono system in Illinois can only address a fraction of that need, and he has spent a large part of his career working to make justice accessible.

I first came to know of Justice Kilbride's commitment to equal justice when we met as members of the Board of the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois. Justice Kilbride served as the Supreme Court liaison to the Lawyers Trust Fund. It was there that I learned how his devotion to justice began early in his career. Justice Kilbride's first job was as an attorney with Prairie State Legal Services, where he saw first-hand the need for and difficulty in providing legal aid. While serving as LTF's liaison to Supreme Court, he was always first to encourage, analyze, and then support new ways to solve issues surrounding equal access. As just one example, Justice Kilbride supported LTF's efforts to increase attorney registration fees – perhaps not a popular decision – but the increase was key to ensuring that a larger portion of the fees would be directed to those with unmet legal needs.

In 2013, as Chief Justice, he opened Illinois courts to the idea of “limited scope representation” so that more legal needs could be met by allowing attorneys to represent clients on limited basis. Although many raised roadblocks and objections to the concept, Justice Kilbride could see the potential – by providing services specifically limited by agreement between the lawyer and the client, total legal fees would be more affordable, leading to access to justice for the client. He worked with the legal needs community to study other states with similar programs and to develop and propose rules to expand access to legal services through limited scope. The idea of limited scope representation had been around for some time, but it was his work and support that ultimately made it a reality in Illinois.

I believe Justice Kilbride's greatest impact on equal justice was his vision for creating the Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice. Justice Kilbride knew that the commitment to equal justice had on making the Illinois court system available to everyone, regardless of financial ability, language barriers, or other access challenges. I was again fortunate to work with him from the beginning of these efforts and saw the commitment and drive he brought to the cause. He took a key role in finding the right structure and support staff, even conducting interviews of key personnel himself. He made certain that the Commission had a broad base, with representatives from the legal needs community, law schools, the courts, and judges, and from all corners of the State. Once again, he saw the potential – that the Commission could be the entity that tackled a myriad of issues, each building on the next. It was his vision for the Commission that resulted in standardized court forms, which allow non-represented litigants more access to the judicial system by simplifying the process. Under his leadership, the Commission, from its start in 2012, had the foresight to begin studying the concept of remote access to the courts – so that when COVID unexpectedly demanded it, we had proposed rules and guidance near final and ready to present to the Supreme Court. The rules were adopted with Justice Kilbride's support in 2020. There are many more examples of positive change brought by the Commission's work that show the success of Justice Kilbride's vision for continued improvements to our system of justice.

I have seen again and again the level of understanding and dedication Justice Kilbride has for making our State and our justice system more equal for everyone. I know I share this experience with many in the legal community and with all the Commissioners. Justice Kilbride had said before that “Illinois has a fine judicial system, but it is not perfect.” Thanks to Justice Kilbride, it is already much better and is on the right path. I am honored to have worked closely with Justice Kilbride, and will miss his presence on the Court. I have no doubt, however, that there is more to come.

Very truly yours,

Jennifer T. Nijman

CHAIR OR STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE AND REMOTE APPEARANCE COMMITTEE
ATJ COMMISSIONER



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

CHAMBERS OF JUSTICE RITA B. GARMAN

From his early days as a legal services attorney, Justice Kilbride has been a passionate advocate for those less fortunate in society. That passion came to the forefront in 2012 when, as Chief Justice, he led the charge to form the Illinois Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. Its mission sought to "promote a culture of civility and inclusion, in which lawyers and judges embody the ideals of the legal profession in service to the administration of justice in our democratic society."

In 2013, the General Assembly threw its support behind the initiative by enacting the Access to Justice Act, formally recognizing the Commission. The Act declares that "[t]he justice system in this State can only function fairly and effectively when there is meaningful access to legal information, resources, and assistance for all litigants, regardless of their income or circumstances."

Since the establishment of the ATJ Commission, Justice Kilbride's bold vision and tireless efforts have resulted in greater access to the legal system for the poor, underprivileged, and underserved members of our society. The Commission has designed a number of programs to promote equal access to justice in our courts and administrative agencies, with particular emphasis on access for self-represented litigants. The Commission has developed standardized court forms that permit self-represented litigants to deal with certain uncontested legal matters, such as name changes, without legal representation. More helpful forms are continually being discussed and put into practice. Language barriers can also create hurdles to accessing justice. To help remedy this problem, the Commission has provided language access services to litigants and created certification programs for court interpreters.

Although these initiatives have the potential to impact self-represented litigants, the poor, and non-English speaking parties, the entire system of justice benefits. Making the system more user-friendly for self-represented litigants requires less courtroom time for their cases. Qualified foreign language and sign language interpreters also help litigants communicate effectively with the court, further advancing the goals of access to justice and prompt decision-making.



Justice Kilbride's foresight and the ATJ Commission's efforts have taken on greater importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. With courthouse access limited and uncertainty abounding, the Commission has promoted new rules and policies on remote appearances, provided a virtual help desk for civil appeals, and worked to streamline the statewide e-filing system.

I had the pleasure of working with Justice Kilbride for almost twenty years. He has been a valued colleague, a true gentleman, and a trusted friend. While his presence will be missed on the Illinois Supreme Court and as liaison to the ATJ Commission, Justice Kilbride's impact on the legal system will live on. He leaves behind a rich legacy championing the poor among us. His efforts have not only helped open wide the doors of the justice system, they have also enabled the underprivileged and the vulnerable to obtain meaningful results. In short, he has given the concept of "access to justice" substance and meaning.

Through his unwavering commitment to the public, Justice Kilbride has left an indelible mark on the courts of Illinois, and it is one that the Supreme Court intends to build on by reducing barriers to access, fostering the public trust, and ensuring that every litigant receives equal and fair justice, regardless of their income or circumstances,

Very truly yours,

Rita B. Garman

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



Justice Tom Kilbride has devoted his professional life to ensuring that Illinois residents from all walks of life have access to justice. When I think of Access to Justice and Justice Kilbride, I am reminded that he worked as a legal aid attorney for many years. This undoubtedly shaped his worldview and inspired him to serve on the forefront of the Access to Justice movement in our state. I am also reminded of the very beginning days of the Access to Justice Commission and our listening tour all around the state. I think back to our interviews of our first candidates who desired to serve

as Executive Director. And, I am very proud of all that the Access to Justice Commission has accomplished since then due to the vision and steadfast support of Justice Tom Kilbride. I am particularly proud of the excellent relationship forged between the Commission on Professionalism and the Access to Justice Commission. Congratulations and Thank You to Justice Kilbride!

Judge Debra B. Walker

FORMER ATJ COMMISSIONER



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

CHAMBERS OF
JUSTICE ROBERT L. CARTER

1819 FOURTH AVENUE
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I have had the great honor of knowing Justice Tom Kilbride since his first Illinois Supreme Court campaign. Throughout his lengthy career, he has been an ardent advocate for marginalized persons and underrepresented groups, people who are all too often disenfranchised in our legal system. Whether working with migrant farm workers, indigent clients at Prairie State Legal Services, or private clients as a solo practitioner, Justice Kilbride saw the plight of the underserved firsthand and recognized the need for a systemic remedy. He fought tirelessly to level the legal playing field for all, regardless of their means or privilege, giving a voice to those who otherwise would not have one. With integrity and compassion, he helped fulfill the promise of equality and justice for all embodied in our state and federal constitutions.

Justice Kilbride's devotion to service carried over into his years as a member of the Illinois Supreme Court. His groundbreaking initiative to create the Access to Justice Commission was the natural outgrowth of his core values. He consistently performed his work with the Commission to provide its members with guidance and support when needed while simultaneously giving them the freedom and inspiration to find innovative solutions to the problems that have barred many Illinoisans from fully participating in our legal system.

Consequently, the Supreme Court Rules were amended to encourage remote nonevidentiary proceedings to make those matters more efficient and economical. Other Rules established a public registry of qualified interpreters enabling lawyers to easily find qualified interpreters to assist them in representing clients with limited English proficiency. Still other Rule changes promoted the use of appropriate judicial accommodations to aid self-represented litigants in being heard and judicial training aimed at successfully managing cases involving SRLs, overcoming implicit bias, understanding indigent SRLs' unique hurdles, and communicating respectfully with all litigants to give them a voice.

Knowing Justice Kilbride has been a privilege. I was fortunate enough to be appointed to the Illinois Third District Appellate Court by him in 2006. As a judge, I will always be grateful for that honor. His masterful and tireless efforts to enable all people, statewide, to seek justice within our legal system will reap untold benefits for generations to come. The ATJ Commission stands today as a memorial to Justice Kilbride's dedication to fulfilling the constitutional promise of giving all Illinoisans equal access to justice. For that, we should all be grateful.

Respectfully,

Robert L. Carter

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



Thank you for this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions made by Justice Tom Kilbride to the access to justice movement in Illinois.

Always a friend to legal aid, Kilbride used his term as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to ensure the Court took the leadership role in Access to Justice by constituting the Access to Justice Commission as a court-sponsored project. He worked with the Court to pass the Access to Justice Act which evaluated the fines and fees structure of the courts and created a legal aid network devoted to veterans and active duty service members.

The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation was asked to take on this challenge of coordinating and funding the Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network (IL-AFLAN). A network of ten legal aid providers connected via a hotline hub, IL-AFLAN has provided 13,774 services to veterans, service members and their families in its first four years of operation. This opportunity helped expand the IEJF's business model in that the IEJF now administers three separate appropriations for civil legal aid and is working with the IL Department of Human Services on a statewide eviction response to the looming crisis.

Justice Kilbride's legal aid background and approachability made all legal aid organizations stand a little taller and dream a little bigger because we knew the Court recognized the importance of increasing accessibility to the court system for all Illinoisans, regardless of their ability to pay.

The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation commends Justice Kilbride's legacy of increasing access to justice for all Illinoisans and thanks him for his awe-inspiring service.

Sincerely,

Leslie Corbett

ILLINOIS EQUAL JUSTICE FOUNDATION
APPOINTING BODY OF THE ATJ COMMISSION



When I think of him, I think about how he started his career in legal aid. He represented our most vulnerable citizens and undoubtedly tried to level the playing field in the courts. As a legal aid lawyer I always admired him as the legal aid lawyer who became a Supreme Court Justice. His trajectory to our highest court did not change his view that all Illinoisans deserve a fair and equitable opportunity to pursue justice within our courts. He used his position to work tirelessly to make the promise of justice a reality for the underserved citizens of this State. It is hard to measure the impact he has had on our court system. However, he is a transformational figure in the work of providing access to the courts for the poor and that will be his legacy.

Andrew M. Weaver

ATJ COMMISSIONER



I had the pleasure of meeting Justice Kilbride following his election to the Illinois Supreme Court at an Illinois State Bar Association Annual Meeting.

Though that occasion was necessarily brief I found him to be truly genuine, not standoffish, and cordial. I continue to find that he exhibits these important human traits. When our Supreme Court formed a Pro Bono Committee I was appointed as a member. That appointment provided me with the opportunity to work with Justice Kilbride on an effort to encourage the lawyers in our state to seriously consider and engage in volunteerism, both more broadly in their communities and at the bar representing litigants unable to afford to retain counsel. There was no sense that we could convince the Court to impose such a requirement on the Illinois bar so our goals, by necessity, were aspirational but nonetheless important. If only everyone had the means to retain counsel such as Patricia Brown Holmes, Robert Clifford, Michael Demetrio or James Montgomery.

Justice Kilbride is keenly aware of the difference in outcomes that result from employing competent counsel. Though he holds these views of the disparate treatment in our legal system that can result for some, it very quickly became apparent to me that Justice Kilbride has a tremendous reverence and respect for the law. But he also never ever hesitated to acknowledge that the legal playing field is not level for everyone. No doubt this vision led him to convince his colleagues on the Court of the need to create the Access to Justice Commission. A historical and monumental effort to achieve access to justice in Illinois courts for everyone without regard to the resources within their reach.

I mentioned to a colleague that I was invited to contribute my thoughts on Justice Kilbride's impact on justice in Illinois and their reaction was that "He should be commended; he did some good things." Never was there a truer statement – He did do some good things and our state's justice system is all the better for it. I trust that wherever life's journey finds him he will continue his efforts towards equal access to justice for everyone.

Thank you Justice Kilbride for your service, It is a pleasure to know you and an honor to consider you my friend.

Judge Leonard Murray

ATJ Commissioner



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

Courts in Illinois are more fair today because of Justice Thomas L. Kilbride.

During his term as Chief Justice, Thomas Kilbride brought reforms and innovations to our court system. Under his leadership, cameras were allowed in courtrooms. Electronic filing of court documents was made a priority. And the Access to Justice Commission was created.

Justice Kilbride recognized that the dramatic rise in self-represented litigants was a challenge to our adversarial court system. In many cases one side is represented by expert counsel and the other comes to court alone. Often both sides are self-represented, especially in family cases. In many courts in Illinois SRLs have limited English proficiency.

My favorite story about Tom Kilbride is when he decided to find out for himself whether courts welcomed non-English speakers. He went to the high-rise Daley Center Courthouse in downtown Chicago and looked for any signage that was not in English. He found only one. Since he doesn't read Spanish, he asked for help translating the sign on a door. It said, "Keep Out." He redoubled his efforts to remove the barriers to justice.

Due to his dedication, the Access to Justice Commission produces forms in many languages and plain English as well. JusticeCorps volunteers act as navigators for SRLs in courthouses across Illinois. Judges are trained to provide procedural fairness so that SRLs have the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Thank you to Justice Thomas L. Kilbride for replacing the "Keep Out" sign with a "Welcome" sign.

Very truly yours,

Mary Jane Theis

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



JOE DAILING

As I have told you privately, your greatest legacy to the people of Illinois is the establishment of the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission which resulted in a court system committed to assuring fair and meaningful access to Illinois courts, particularly for vulnerable and often low and moderate income litigants who are unable to find legal representation. As a result of your leadership and support you leave a court system that is open and accessible for all Illinois residents.

In June, 2012, when you as Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court announced the establishment of the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission, probably few people realized how fundamentally the Commission's work over the years and the adoption of its recommendations by the Court for improving access to the court system would change the operations of the Illinois Court system, particularly at the trial court level and particularly for low and moderate income self-represented litigants.

We both know that the Access to Justice Commission was not the first attempt to improve access to the court system in Illinois. Steps had been taken by several groups to address the problems encountered by the trial courts which were facing a steadily increasing number of unrepresented litigants coming into the court system. It became very clear over time that a more comprehensive approach to the problem was needed to reform a legal system based on the assumption that each litigant would be represented by a lawyer.

In Illinois we were fortunate to have Illinois Legal Aid Online which had developed online legal information materials which not only educated unrepresented litigants about their legal problems but also provided the technology for unrepresented litigants to develop their own pleadings using document assembly technology. My role at the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice was to set up a free public access location for a legal self-help center in each county in Illinois working with Illinois Legal Aid Online. Initially I worked with Teri Ross and later worked with Stacie Colston Patterson visiting every county in Illinois at least three times. The legal self-help centers were strongly supported by the judges, circuit clerks and public libraries because the centers were a resource where a litigant could research and find legal information and pleadings to use in court. But these self-represented litigants were still operating in a system with often arcane rules and procedures designed for lawyers.

As we observed the structural problems which made access to the court system very difficult for unrepresented individuals, it was clear that the Illinois Supreme Court needed to be involved in solving this problem. What was needed, in the end, was a reform of the court

system to better assure fair and equitable access to the courts for all litigants, not just those who were represented. It was not a small task. When we first met to discuss the establishment of an Access to Justice Commission, I was not sure what your reaction would be. You did not disappoint. After considerable discussion you agreed to undertake the task.

I should not have been surprised. You had a long history of a deep and personal commitment to improving access to justice for low income people. You showed that commitment to your clients as a legal aid attorney at Prairie State Legal Services and also serving as Prairie State's first program wide Pro Bono Coordinator. When you went into private practice, you continued handling pro bono cases. In many ways, convincing the rest of the Illinois Supreme Court to support your proposal to establish the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission was a logical extension of your long commitment to increasing access to justice for the often most vulnerable people in our society.

Success was not pre-ordained. It was not without risk. I felt very comfortable that the Commission would be a success but I must admit that it has been far more successful than I had ever anticipated. Approved pleadings, substantially improved language access, clear definitions of the roles of court personnel and the increased availability of usable and understandable information about legal problems, the operations of the court systems for litigants was far more than I expected.

However, for me, the greatest change has been in the attitude towards unrepresented litigants. When I started in practice many years ago, the almost universal response to an unrepresented litigant arriving at the circuit clerk's office or in a court hearing was "You need to get a lawyer to represent you." That is no longer the case. When an unrepresented litigant arrives at the circuit clerk's office or in a courtroom, the response is to tell the litigant about the options that she or he has including legal services programs, pro bono programs, the legal self-help center and in cases of domestic violence the local domestic violence victim advocates. Courts are now, more than ever, places where unrepresented litigants feel welcome and where assistance is provided to help unrepresented litigants solve his or her legal problem.

Changing the culture of a major institution is no small accomplishment and I hope that you are proud of your work. While many people were involved and continue to be involved in improving access to justice, as a leader you provided the structure and support for this important enterprise.

Thank you, Tom, for your leadership and commitment to build a court system that is fair and accessible to all. Our society is better because of your work.

Joe Dailing

FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ILLINOIS COALITION FOR EQUAL JUSTICE

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It takes a special person to both recognize that there are inadequacies and injustices in many aspects of our society and to do something about it. Justice Thomas Kilbride is such a person. His vision was critical to the creation of the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission. His leadership was critical to the identification of areas in need of reformation in order to better the availability and effectiveness of the justice system to all of society. His empathy and humanity has guided the Commission in every detail of its mission. The positive impact that the Commission has had, and will continue to have, is a direct result of Justice Kilbride’s deep passion and sincere commitment for a just society.

Justice Daniel J. Pierce
CO-CHAIR OF APPELLATE COMMITTEE
ATJ COMMISSIONER

When I began my career in the clerk’s office, twenty some years ago, I remember the consistent faces of those we served daily. Justice Kilbride was among them. He always had a kind word, genuine personality and a steadfast dedication to those he represented. I missed seeing him on a regular basis when he was elected to the Illinois Supreme Court but was confident he would continue his good work statewide as he did in Rock Island County. He never let me down. When Justice Kilbride asked me to join the Commission, it was a great compliment to be asked to join his endeavor. I share his passion of creating an environment in the local courts that creates confidence and reduces barriers for self-represented litigants. The work he began will continue and the benefits will be seen for many years to come.

Tammy Weikert
ATJ COMMISSIONER



SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

I will always remember the two years I served with you on the Illinois Supreme Court. But Illinois citizens will remember you because it was during your tenure as Chief Justice that the Commission on Access to Justice was established by the Illinois Supreme Court. The purpose of the Commission is to enhance equal access to justice in the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable. The Commission will ensure that all persons are seen and heard in Illinois’ courts and for that reason you will always be remembered by the people in this state.

Thank you for your service,

P. Scott Neville, Jr.
ILLINOIS SUPREME
COURT JUSTICE

LAW OFFICES

POWER ROGERS, LLP

Tom and I have known each other for over 20 years now, having joined the Court together in December of 2000. In that time, I have grown to deeply admire Tom’s generous and caring spirit, his quiet wisdom, and his passionate commitment to equal justice under the law.

Tom listened to judges, listened to social service providers and the public, about how the court system can more effectively and more efficiently serve the cause of justice in Illinois. Tom’s listening ear resulted in him spearheading the creation of the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission. Tom nurtured a number of bold initiatives, all of which aim to improve the administration of justice in this state, none more important than the Access to Justice Commission.

There is no better person to be recognized on his commitment and leadership to assuring fair and equitable access to Illinois courts than my friend, Tom Kilbride.

Sincerely,
Robert R. Thomas
ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE (RET.)

“

Justice Thomas Kilbride’s entire career has been steeped in providing access to justice. He practiced law at Prairie State Legal Services and performed volunteer work for the Children’s Disability Project while in private practice. As a Supreme Court Justice, he made it his mission to provide access to justice to all. He not only created the Access to Justice Commission, but promoted access to justice in myriad ways.

Due to Justice Kilbride’s efforts, non-English speakers are now fully guaranteed language access in our courts. Pro Bono Rules were updated to allow retired, out of state and corporate lawyers to perform Pro Bono work and plain language forms are now commonplace-making it easier for the

ever-increasing number of self-represented litigants to navigate the courts. And speaking of navigating the courts, Justice Kilbride supported and championed Illinois JusticeCorps, allowing it to expand to Lake County and other jurisdictions, and making many of our courthouses less intimidating for some and justice more accessible to many.

Justice Kilbride worked tirelessly to improve our courts and will always be remembered as a model public servant and true champion advocate for access to justice.

Judge Jorge Ortiz
CO-CHAIR OF COMMUNITY TRUST COMMITTEE
ATJ COMMISSIONER



Having had a front-row seat for the fight to increase access to justice in Illinois over the past 30 years, I can say without fear of contradiction that no one in the history of our state has done more to advance that cause than Justice Tom Kilbride.

Justice Kilbride has often told the story of how his first task as a newly minted legal aid lawyer was traveling to a rural county to help shut down the local legal aid office due to funding cuts. Clearly, the lessons of that painful experience never left him, because Justice Kilbride has been on offense ever since – doing everything in his power to build and strengthen the legal aid system.

In his first year as the Supreme Court liaison to the board of the Lawyers Trust Fund, Justice Kilbride championed a \$49 add-on to the attorney registration fee to support legal aid. Demonstrating the adage that many hands make light work, the legal aid fee has generated tens of millions of dollars over the past two decades, allowing legal aid programs to create new projects, hire new staff, and serve more clients.

Justice Kilbride's leadership in creating the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice put the issue of a level playing field for all litigants, whether or not they could afford representation, front and center on the agenda of the Illinois court system. That work has paid enormous dividends, and is only beginning.

The cumulative effects of Justice Kilbride's vision and leadership has made critical differences in the lives of tens of thousands of our fellow Illinoisans – helping to keep food on tables, roofs over heads, and sometimes changing the trajectory of a family's life over generations. These benefits will continue to accrue and multiply for the foreseeable future.

In all of our interactions over the past 20 years, Justice Kilbride has listened with patience, reflected with wisdom, spoken with candor, and acted with conviction. His words of encouragement were often accompanied by a rueful chuckle that conveyed a powerful truth: Life does not always go the way we want it to, but we keep fighting for what we believe in.

Mark Marquardt

LAWYERS TRUST FUND OF ILLINOIS
APPOINTING BODY OF THE ATJ COMMISSION



Before Justice Kilbride became Chief Judge, Illinois was in the bottom third of the country in all the ways access to justice are measured. Under his leadership and his drive to see us do better, we turned the state upside down in making the court system available to all of our residents. From unifying the widely diverse courts orders in each county into standard wording which could then be easily translated into more than 20 languages, to training court personnel to remember they serve the citizens of our state and need to do it courteously. For all three years, he relentlessly drove the Access to Justice Commission to spread the word throughout the state and brought reform to every part of the justice system. Clearly, his legacy will be that he brought our state to the place it needed to be, serving all of our citizens equally and openly with the level of justice to which they deserve!

Michael Pope

Former ATJ Commissioner



Justice Kilbride's efforts to expand Access to Justice are inspiring to me, to law students, and to lawyers throughout Illinois. His tireless work and dedication is a testament to what we can accomplish to make justice real when we work together.

In my work as a clinical professor at Northern Illinois University College of Law, I am particularly grateful for Justice Kilbride's service as a member of our College of Law's Board of Visitors and for his willingness to inspire our law students and alumni on countless occasions. Justice Kilbride models for law students and lawyers alike what it means to be a "Citizen Lawyer" and a "Servant Leader" through a career in law.

One of the first times that I heard Justice Kilbride speak about access to justice was on October 2, 2013, as part of NIU College of Law's Murer Professionalism Series. At that time, Justice Kilbride inspired our first year law students by stating, "You're joining a grand tradition. I say that because lawyers in the history of this country have been among those who've pursued the lofty principles of individual dignity, protection from tyranny of the majority, civil rights, justice and fairness." I have always found his advice so inspiring, in part because no one has served these lofty principles of the legal tradition better than Justice Kilbride.

Justice Kilbride has established a strong foundation for the work of the Illinois Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. I am so proud to serve as a Commissioner and hope that our work will continue Justice Kilbride's mission to make the Illinois court system a place of dignity, fairness, and justice for all citizens.

Wendy Vaughn

ATJ COMMISSIONER



HINSHAW & CULBERTSON LLP
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I worked for Justice Kilbride from December 2008 through October 2013. This included his entire term as Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court from October 2010 through October 2013. Justice Kilbride had hired me as a law clerk, but once he became Chief Justice he ended up having me focus almost entirely on the “Chief stuff,” as he called it.

The “Chief stuff” was substantial. Justice Kilbride had many issues he wanted to address while serving as Chief, including cameras in the courtroom, e-filing and e-business modernization, and working with the legislature to restore full funding to the judicial branch—especially for probation funding. When the idea for the Access to Justice Commission was presented to the Court, Chief Justice Kilbride was quite intrigued. Prior to graduating from college, he had spent years as an organizer for the United Farm Workers. He began his legal career as a legal-aid lawyer in the Quad Cities. So access to justice was a big reason why he became a lawyer.

His only reservation was a concern that a commission, if enacted, would be a stodgy body that only produced reports destined to gather dust on some shelf. That reservation, however, proved to be unfounded. The inaugural members of the Commission were all devoted to action. And first among equals was the Commission’s first Chair, Jeff Colman.

The first few years of the Commission were a whirlwind of activity. Supreme Court Rule changes were proposed and adopted; standardized forms for trial and appellate courts were drafted and approved; staff was hired; outreach was made with Illinois Law Schools, and Corporation Counsel; language access was prioritized; and legislation was introduced and adopted. Chief Justice Kilbride reveled in the work the Commission was doing because real progress was being made. He was thrilled with how his colleagues on the Supreme Court embraced the work of the Commission,

and how the bench and bar supported its cause. In a short period of time, access to justice became more than an aspirational concern: it became a core function of the Supreme Court’s work.

This core function was fully realized when the Supreme Court, under Chief Justice Rita B. Garman, created the Access to Justice Division in the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. This brought the work of the Commission within the AOIC, ensuring access to justice had become, and would remain, one of the central functions of the administration of the court system in Illinois.

One of Justice Kilbride’s greatest attributes is that he does not care about who receives credit for work, only that work is done. But the Commission would not be what it is today had it not been for his support. Of course, the Commission would not be what it is today either without the many people—including the Justices, Commissioners, staff, and volunteers—who have poured their time and effort into its mission.

At least two of these people left us too soon: Justice Laura C. Liu and Director Michael J. Tardy. Justice Liu was taken by cancer far too young, but her work on language access resulted in changing the only foreign language sign in the Daley Center from one that told people not to get onto the judges’ elevator, to signs today that help people navigate the courthouse in their own language. And Director Tardy, who led the AOIC during the early years of the Commission, gave full AOIC support to the Commission and was a critical supporter of creating the Access to Justice Division. The work of both will reverberate on through the work of the Commission.

It was, and most certainly will be, the greatest honor of my career to work for Justice Kilbride. As someone who witnessed the creation and early years of the Access to Justice Commission, and his efforts to promote access to justice, I can attest the recognition the Commission is giving Justice Kilbride is greatly deserved.

Respectfully,

Adam R. Vaught

FORMER COUNSELOR TO CHIEF JUSTICE KILBRIDE

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT COMMISSION

