

April 2023 The Commission was established by Supreme Court Rule 10-100 "to promote, facilitate, and

enhance equal access to justice with an emphasis on access to the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable." The Commission is composed of five members of the judiciary, five lawyers, and one member who is not a lawyer. Seven of these members are appointed by the Court. The Commission accomplishes its work through various committees and subcommittees and is staffed by the Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. In 2022, the Commission observed its 10th anniversary. To commemorate this milestone, the

be done. This publication also complied with the Commission's duty under Rule 10-100(c)(7) to recognize the contributions of leadership and commitment to access to justice. We encourage you all to read the magazine to learn more. Below is a short summary of some ongoing projects that the ATJ Commission is working on.

Commission published a magazine reflecting on the work which has been done and the work to

Law Student Leadership Summit Disability Access Committee

Leaders Access to Justice Summit. This program launched in 2019 with the plan to host it every two years; we skipped the event in

Last month, we held our second Law Student

2021 due to the pandemic. This year, Kirkland & Ellis LLP provided the site for the Summit and the Commission welcomed 71 law student leaders and faculty members from our nine Illinois law schools as well as Illinois JusticeCorps Fellows.



and Pro Bono. Participants also heard from

Justice Elizabeth Rochford who spoke with attorneys and judges during a networking lunch. After lunch, the attendees participated in a simulation about navigating the court and social service systems as a self-represented litigant.

Guides respond to the questions and provide assistance. English and Spanish speakers are

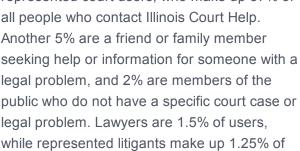
text 833-411-1121 or visit ilcourthelp.gov to send a message. A team of eight trained Court

Illinois Court Help

Court users contact Illinois Court Help by phone, text message, or email to get help navigating the court system. Anyone seeking court information or with a question may call or

connected immediately to a Court Guide for assistance, and people who speak other languages are assisted by a Guide through an interpreter. Court users have found this service to be extremely helpful. Since the inception of Illinois Court Help, there have been 28,854 contacts with the service by 18,050 people. Court users from 101 Illinois counties have used Illinois Court Help, with 42% of all interactions related to a case or problem in Cook County.

IL Court Your guide through the courts The service is predominantly used by selfrepresented court users, who make up 87% of



users.

2% to traffic cases, and 6% to other or unknown issues. As to civil case inquiries, the top subject areas are: • Small claims – 22.4% Divorce – 18.4% Eviction/housing – 13.1% • Family – 10% Probate – 5.3 • Orders of Protection – 4.25%

Court Navigator Network

In addition to Illinois Court Help, we directly

Most of the questions relate to civil cases or

problems (88%) as to the remaining inquiries:

4% relate to criminal cases /criminal records,

- assist court users throughout the state through our Court Navigator Network. The Network includes our Illinois JusticeCorps and Self-
- programs. Since 2012, we have partnered with the Illinois

Bar Foundation and the Chicago Bar

provide personal assistance to self-

initiative through the federal AmeriCorps

Foundation to conduct the Illinois JusticeCorps

program. The members of Illinois JusticeCorps

represented litigants (SRLs) at courthouses in

serving 12 counties: Champaign, Cook, Kane,

Kankakee, Knox, Lake, Madison, McHenry,

different parts of our state. The program has

grown from serving two counties to now

Represented Litigant Coordinator grant

McLean, Peoria, Will, and Winnebago. In the past few months, we have taken steps which could lead to further expansion of JusticeCorps. In late 2017, the Commission launched the Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator grant program. Through this program we provide grants, support, and education to individuals in local courts to develop resources and assistance to SRLs. In the first five years of the

program, the Commission has awarded over

\$750,000 in grant funds to local jurisdictions whose staff and volunteers have helped nearly

250,000 SRLs. In the current program year

reconfiguring space to have SRL-dedicated

Resolution Programs for divorce cases, and

(August 2022-July 2023), projects include

computer workstations, developing Early

partnering with pro bono lawyers and legal aid agencies to provide legal advice. To fulfill a major initiative of the Illinois Judicial Conference's 2019-2022 Strategic Agenda, the Commission combined these programs to form the Court Navigator Network and added other members including additional court staff and circuit clerks. The Network continues to reach nearly all corners of Illinois and has over 100 members representing all 25 of the current judicial circuits covering 52 counties. The Network members share ideas, develop new resources, establish programs for better assisting self-represented litigants, and receive

This year's training program has included

Legal Advice, Communication and De-

sessions on the topics of Legal Information vs.

escalation, Emotional Wellbeing and Self-Care,

Different Types of Protective Orders, Decedent

Estates and Probate Court, and Court Patrons

specialized training.

with Disabilities.

Community Trust Committee Through the Community Trust Committee, the Commission seeks to increase "public trust and confidence in the courts by bridging the gap between the courts and the communities they serve." Deannie Brown, the Court's Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, is included in the Committee to assist and advise the Committee in its work. Presently, the Committee is beginning work on a project in collaboration with Illinois Access to Justice (ILA2J), a state-wide program that seeks to mitigate the consequences of

detention and incarceration and has created a network of community navigators. We hope to

cross-train members of our Navigator Network

and the ILA2J community navigators with the

information about the courts across Illinois

communities. The Committee is working to create a training model as a first step in this

goal of increasing the availability and knowledge of important resources and

collaboration.

Guides.

In January 2023, the Committee partnered with the Commission on Professionalism to present a training at the courthouse of the Sixth Municipal District of the Cook County Circuit Court (Markham). Through different modes of presentation, participants learned and discussed issues surrounding civility and barriers which prevent full and fair access to our courts. The discussions covered topics such as leveraging active listening skills, improving customer service, knowing the types of information (and not advice) court staff may provide, and making referrals to available resources and assistance such as Illinois Court Help.

the development of policies and programming addressing the barriers to equitable access to

In 2022, the Supreme Court approved the

Access Committee, to guide the Commission in

formation of the Commission's Disability

our courts faced by individuals with disabilities. The members of this new committee have significant background and insight into the concerns of individuals with disabilities. Scott Block, the AOIC's Statewide Behavioral Health Administrator, also serves on the Committee. The Committee's mission is "to promote equal access to the court system for people with disabilities by partnering with the disability community and by engaging all stakeholders, from the community to the courtroom, to

identify and address barriers to the court and legal process." The Committee is considering the following activities relating to the empowerment of CDCs: creating ADA training for CDCs and court staff centered on disability access; · developing digital resources, including

court patrons with disabilities and an interactive listserv or website for CDCs; ensuring that every courthouse has an

active CDC supported by staff; increasing CDC information sharing

an accessible website with resources for

- through a listserv or similar communication mechanism; and empowering AOIC staff to respond to disability-related questions.
- Committee activities related to standardizing processes might include:

proposing a statewide disability access

policy;

 standardizing accommodation and grievance requests procedures across the state; encouraging regular reporting from

CDCs on disability-related issues or questions; and

- creating a system for data collection on court users with disabilities.
- In 2012, the Commission created the statewide standardized forms initiative to help SRLs gain more meaningful access to the court system

and to improve the overall administration of

justice in our state. The project creates

where there is a high volume of SRLs.

The Forms Project

Governed by Supreme Court Rule 10-101 and M.R. 25401, all approved standardized forms

standardized forms in areas of law and practice

are required to be accepted in all Illinois courts and be in plain language and legally sufficient. As such, the Commission created a rigorous process for the development and approval of the standardized court forms, which includes subcommittee drafting, user testing, public comment, and approval by the Commission's Forms Committee. MOTION TO VACATE & EXPUNGE ELIGIBLE CANNABIS COUNTY CONVICTIONS Other names used in these cases Date of birth Race Since the program's inception, 13 subcommittees consisting entirely of volunteer



Court appeals are forthcoming in 2023.

Recently, the Commission and Division, with

the assistance of a consultant, completed a business process analysis to streamline the procedures for creating, maintaining and

reviewing the forms with the goal of making the

completed a form design review with a second

consultant with the goal of making the forms

process more efficient. Additionally, we

members have created a total of 55 form suites

- 39 for use in Circuit Courts, 12 for use in

more usable and understandable for the user. It is our hope that the suggested changes to the process and format will be implemented in 2023. Language Access Program

In October of 2022, the Language Access

Committee of the Commission presented a

report to the Illinois Judicial Conference. The

Judicial Conference had asked the Committee

to study and evaluate the use of Remote Interpreting (RI) in Illinois and nationwide. RI is a method of providing interpreting services to court users from a remote location by telephone or video conference (VRI). The Committee conducted surveys, evaluated available local and national information and data relating to RI, studied entities that provide RI services, and researched the practices of federal courts and certain state courts relating to RI. The Committee sought to identify the benefits of RI and determine ways to promote

1. RI allows for the efficient and economical

interpreters are not readily available and

when interpretation in rare languages is

3. Illinois courts have increased their use of RI over the past two years, but a large

number of counties do no use RI;

outreach to circuits may be helpful to

address any existing concerns and

4. Training and developing resources on

the use of RI, in particular VRI and

encouraging a greater knowledge and

understanding of RI and the technology

the time period of the pandemic; RI has

standards, training materials, and best practices relating to RI from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and

become more entrenched in those

7. There is an abundance of helpful

resources, minimum technology

8. Technology allows for creative and

access to court services.

innovative ways to increase language

use of qualified interpreters.

2. RI is particularly beneficial for courts

located in areas where qualified

its use in our state courts.

The Committee found that:

required.

issues.

courts.

other states.

behind RI would assist in a broader and more successful utilization of RI in Illinois. 5. There are a large number of entities providing RI nationwide resulting in competition as to pricing and services. 6. As in Illinois, state courts across the country increased the use of RI during

The Committee recommended certain specific steps to increase and enhance the use of RI, and in particular VRI, in Illinois. In general, the Committee recommended conducting targeted outreach to individual circuits; critically evaluating existing RI companies; updating the Language Access Policy and the Language Access Plan; creating minimum technology

standards and criteria for the use of RI, training and resources on RI and a centralized resource center; continuously evaluating current RI practices in our state; and tracking technological advances in providing language access services. The Illinois Judicial Conference approved the recommendations set forth in the Committee's report and asked the Committee to prioritize and execute the recommendations. The Committee plans to start with regional meetings via Zoom which would discuss the benefits of VRI and RI and ways to address

any issues that courts may have as to these

types of interpretations.

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

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice

Commissioners: Hon. David K. Overstreet, Sup. Ct. Liaison Hon. Mary K. Rochford, Chair

> Hon. Jorge Ortiz Hon. Dominique Ross Hon. Sanjay Tailor Wendy Vaughn Andrew M. Weaver

In 2022, two original Commission members, Judge Leonard Murray of the Circuit Court of Cook County and Justice Daniel Pierce of the First Appellate District left the Commission. They both served as Commissioners for over 10 years and we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to them for their tremendous support of our work. We were then happy to welcome Judge Dominique Ross of the Circuit Court of Cook County and Justice Sanjay Tailor of the First Appellate District. Marisa Wiesman joined the Division in January 2023 as Deputy Director of Strategic Planning, to work on strategic planning with the Illinois Judicial Conference and on other ATJ initiatives. Brent Page started in October 2022 as the Senior Program Manager for Forms. August Hieber joined the team in August 2022 as the Senior Program Manager for Community Trust and Inclusive Access. Janice Coleman, Tahmia Dugger, Cali Morrissey, and Sara Schlecht started as Court Guides for Illinois Court Help in August 2022. Lillie Schneyer joined the division in May 2022 as the Program Coordinator for Forms. We are currently seeking applications for two additional Court

> Carolyn H. Clift Linda T. Coberly Hon. Thomas M. Harris, Jr. Jennifer T. Nijman

Tammy R. Weikert The Access to Justice Division at the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts Staff: Alison D. Spanner, Director Jessica Acosta, Court Guide Noor Alawawda, Sr. Program Manager Janice Coleman, Court Guide Lisa Colpoys, Supervising Sr. Program Manger Helen Doig, Court Guide Tahmia Dugger, Court Guide Kathryn Hensley, Supervising Sr. Program Manger August Hieber, Sr. Program Manager Cali Morrissey, Court Guide Brent Page, Sr. Program Manager Jill Roberts, Deputy Director Sara Schlecht, Court Guide

Lillie Schneyer, Program Coordinator Sarah Song, Supervising Sr. Program Manger Brittany Underwood, Court Guide Marisa Wiesman, Deputy Director, Strategic Planning Nina Wilson, Court Guide Spanner at aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov

For more information about the ATJ Commission's work, please contact Alison

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