



April 2023

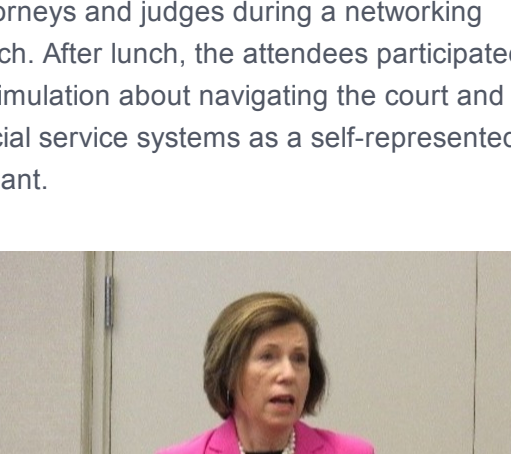
The Commission was established by Supreme Court Rule 10-100 "to promote, facilitate, and enhance equal access to justice with an emphasis on access to the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable." The Commission is composed of five members 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 Commission published a [magazine](#) reflecting on the work which has been done and the work to 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.

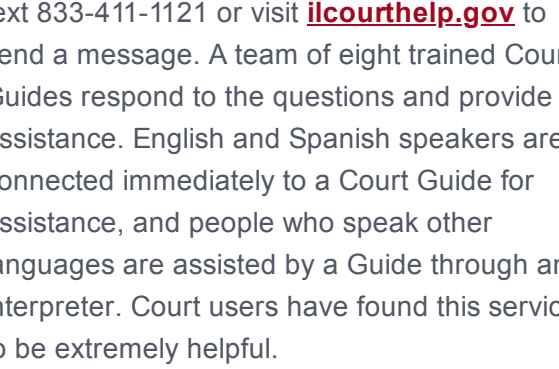
Below is a short summary of some ongoing projects that the ATJ Commission is working on.

Law Student Leadership Summit

Last month, we held our second Law Student Leaders Access to Justice Summit. This program launched in 2019 with the plan to host it every two years; we skipped the event in 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.



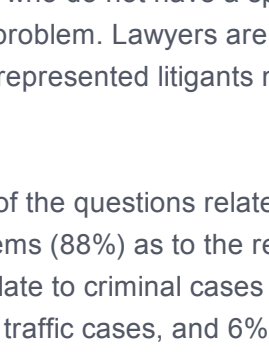
The program began with an inspiring welcome from Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis. Panelists then spoke about Access to Justice in Court Systems Across the Nation, the Role of Innovation and Technology, and How to Make an Impact as a New Attorney; and Mentorship and Pro Bono. Participants also heard from 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.



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 text 833-411-1121 or visit [ilcourthelp.gov](#) to send a message. A team of eight trained Court Guides respond to the questions and provide assistance. English and Spanish speakers are 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.



Your guide through the courts

The service is predominantly used by self-represented court users, who make up 87% of all people who contact Illinois Court Help. Another 5% are a friend or family member seeking help or information for someone with a legal problem, and 2% are members of the public who do not have a specific court case or legal problem. Lawyers are 1.5% of users, while represented litigants make up 1.25% of users.

Most of the questions relate to civil cases or problems (88%) as to the remaining inquiries: 4% relate to criminal cases /criminal records, 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 assist court users throughout the state through our Court Navigator Network. The Network includes our Illinois JusticeCorps and Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator grant programs.

Since 2012, we have partnered with the Illinois Bar Foundation and the Chicago Bar Foundation to conduct the Illinois JusticeCorps initiative through the federal AmeriCorps program. The members of Illinois JusticeCorps provide personal assistance to self-represented litigants (SRLs) at courthouses in different parts of our state. The program has grown from serving two counties to now serving 12 counties: Champaign, Cook, Kane, Kankakee, Knox, Lake, Madison, McHenry, 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 grants to local jurisdictions whose staff and volunteers have helped nearly 250,000 SRLs. In the current program year (August 2022-July 2023), projects include reconfiguring space to have SRLs dedicated computer workstations, developing Early Resolution Programs for divorce cases, and 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 specialized training.

This year's training program has included sessions on the topics of Legal Information vs. Legal Advice, Communication and De-escalation, Emotional Wellbeing and Self-Care, Different Types of Protective Orders, Decedent Estates and Probate Court, and Court Patrons 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 goal of increasing the availability and knowledge of important resources and information about the courts across Illinois communities. The Committee is working to create a training model as a first step in this collaboration.

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.

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.

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 Guides.

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice

Commissioners:

Hon. David K. Overstreet, Sup. Ct. Liaison
 Hon. Mary K. Rochford, Chair
 Carolyn H. Clift
 Linda T. Coberly
 Hon. Thomas M. Harris, Jr.
 Jennifer T. Nijman
 Hon. Jorge Ortiz
 Hon. Dominique Ross
 Hon. Sanjay Tailor
 Wendy Vaughn
 Andrew M. Weaver
 Tammy R. Weikert

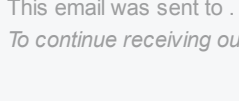
The Access to Justice Division at the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts

Staff:

Alison D. Spinner, 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 Manager
 Brittany Underwood, Court Guide
 Marisa Wiesman, Deputy Director, Strategic Planning
 Nina Wilson, Court Guide

For more information about the ATJ Commission's work, please contact Alison Spinner at aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov

Share this email:



Manage your preferences | Opt out using TrueRemove™
 Got this as a forward? Sign up to receive our future emails.
 View this email online.

2nd and Capitol Ave Supreme Court Bldg
 Springfield, IL | 62706 US

This email was sent to .

To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.

emma

Subscribe to our email list.