



Supreme Court of Illinois

February 4, 2026

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT TO HOLD ORAL ARGUMENTS AT WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY ON MARCH 11

Western Illinois University will host the 2026 installment of the Illinois Supreme Court's Riding the Circuit program as justices hear oral arguments in two cases on Wednesday, March 11, beginning at 10 a.m., in the University Union Grand Ballroom.

"We are thrilled to welcome the Illinois Supreme Court to our campus for this incredible event," Interim Executive Director of Advancement and Alumni Relations Amy Crosby said. "The day will provide an unparalleled opportunity for local students and the WIU community to experience the judicial process in action."

"Holding the Supreme Court's oral arguments at Western Illinois University continues a tradition of openness and public education," Chief Justice P. Scott Neville, Jr said. "Seeing the process firsthand helps demystify the courts and their role in daily life."

Illinois Supreme Court Justice and WIU alumna Mary K. O'Brien '86 shared in Crosby's and Chief Justice Neville's enthusiasm for the event.

"I have so many fond memories of my time here at Western Illinois University. To return home nearly four decades later alongside my colleagues on the Supreme Court is a profound honor," Justice O'Brien said. "We hope to show the WIU community that the Court is a transparent forum where every argument and action is tested against the framework of the Illinois Constitution and the rule of law, which ultimately serves as the bedrock of our free society."

Arguments will begin at 10 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom and will be livestreamed on the university's YouTube channel. Ballroom doors will open at 8:30 a.m., and all attendees are encouraged to arrive by 9:30 a.m. Backpacks and other large items or bags will not be permitted in the Ballroom. A moderated question-and-answer session with Ninth Judicial Circuit Court Judges Heidi Benson and Nigel Graham, along with attorney Emily Sutton, will follow the oral arguments.

Area middle and high schools are invited to bring students. Schools interested in attending can RSVP using the link provided by March 4, or contact Crosby at al-crosby@wiu.edu. Several hundred local students are expected to attend.

A limited number of seats are available to the public. Those interested in attending should RSVP using the link provided by March 4, or contact the Director of Donor Relations and Special Events, Drew Donahoo, at am-donahoo@wiu.edu.

Since 2008, the Supreme Court has held oral arguments in locations across Illinois to raise awareness of the role courts play in interpreting state law. The practice of holding Supreme Court arguments outside Springfield dates back to an old tradition called “riding the circuit.” It began in medieval England, where judges traveled to local communities so people could see the law at work. The United States adopted the same idea at its founding, requiring Supreme Court justices to travel so the public would understand and trust the new courts. Illinois followed this practice after becoming a state in 1818, until the 1848 Constitution ended it. Today, traveling Supreme and Appellate Court arguments still serve the same purpose: bringing the judiciary closer to the people.

This program is sponsored by the Illinois Supreme Court, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission, and the WIU Foundation. Details of the two cases will be released at a later date.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: James Brunner, Public Information Officer of the Illinois Supreme Court at 217.208.3354 or ibrunner@illinoiscourts.gov.)