

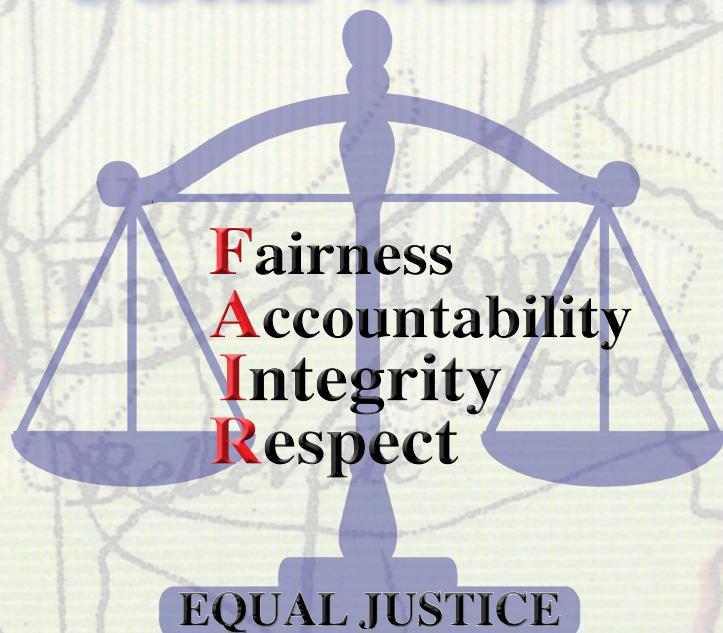


Illinois Judicial Branch

Strategic Agenda 2026-2028



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ILLINOIS JUDICIAL CONFERENCE: PLANNING FOR THE ILLINOIS JUDICIAL BRANCH

Article VI, Section 17 of the Illinois Constitution directs the Illinois Supreme Court to “provide by rule for an annual judicial conference to consider the work of the courts and to suggest improvements in the administration of justice.” Illinois Supreme Court Rule 41 establishes the Illinois Judicial Conference (IJC) and designates it as the body to strategically plan for the Illinois Judicial Branch.

The IJC is a multi-disciplinary body of 29 members: 15 judges and 14 members who are not judges. The membership of the IJC is diverse and representative of all geographic areas of the state. The Chief Justice serves as chair.

The IJC fulfills its charge through the development and implementation of a strategic agenda for the Illinois Judicial Branch. The strategic planning process, which relies on open dialogue and collaboration, allows judicial officers, court personnel, and justice system partners to come together to think beyond day-to-day

problems, anticipate and plan for the future, and effectively allocate and use limited resources to improve the delivery of justice. Each three-year strategic agenda sets broad goals for the Illinois Judicial Branch. Annually, the IJC develops an operational plan which identifies specific strategic initiatives for the coming year. Each strategic initiative is assigned to an existing Supreme Court committee or to an IJC task force created to complete the initiative.

The 2026-2028 Illinois Judicial Branch Strategic Agenda marks the Illinois Judicial Branch’s third strategic agenda. It builds on the success of its predecessors and reflects months of thoughtful deliberations by the IJC, and input from justice system partners about the challenges and opportunities facing the Judicial Branch. The IJC will continue to listen and respond to needs across the state to ensure that the Judicial Branch is a trusted institution that serves the people of Illinois.

THE IJC AT A GLANCE

- **29 judicial and nonjudicial members**
- **Represents all five appellate districts**
- **Advises the Supreme Court on policy, planning, and innovation**
- **Oversees the Branch’s long-term plan**



From Justice MARY JANE THEIS CHIEF JUSTICE, 2022-2025



In 2018, the Illinois Judicial Conference (IJC) was reconstituted as the strategic planning body for the Illinois Judicial Branch. In our busy world, this commitment to strategic planning highlights the importance of taking the time to think long-term and big picture about the work of the Judicial Branch and how we can best serve the people of Illinois as a separate and co-equal branch of government.

The success of the 2022-2025 Judicial Branch Strategic Agenda is a testament to the strong commitment and talent of so many Judicial Branch stakeholders. During this three-year period, the IJC and its many task forces worked on 26 initiatives. These initiatives involved hundreds of judges, lawyers, court staff, and other partners who volunteered their time and expertise to improve the administration of justice in Illinois.

Some of the great accomplishments of the 2022-2025 Strategic Agenda include:

- 1. Artificial Intelligence:** The Supreme Court Policy on Artificial Intelligence (AI) reflects the Court's commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards in the administration of justice, while exploring the potential benefits of new AI technologies in a dynamic landscape. The accompanying Judicial Reference Sheet supports judges in understanding the risks and benefits of AI use.
- 2. Criminal Indigent Defense:** The IJC's work on this topic in 2023 was instrumental in setting the stage for the passage of the FAIR Act, which seeks to increase resources for public defenders across the state.
- 3. Public Trust and Confidence:** The IJC completed multiple initiatives designed to enhance public trust and confidence in the Judicial Branch, including creation of a video to help case participants understand remote appearance procedures and expectations, resources to support local courts develop websites that meet the needs of the public, and a comprehensive review of the Branch's extended media coverage policies.
- 4. Improving the Juror Experience:** Jury service is a cornerstone of our justice system. Updated jury service brochures, tools to help local courts simplify juror communications and procedures, and resources to support the mental health of jurors will improve the experience of the people fulfilling this important civic duty.

My colleagues and I are deeply grateful to the members of the IJC and the many others who contributed to the success of the 2022-2025 Judicial Branch Strategic Agenda. Our work continues and I look forward to the accomplishments of the 2026-2028 Strategic Agenda.

From Justice P. SCOTT NEVILLE, JR.

CHIEF JUSTICE, 2025-2028



“Where we stand is not as important as the direction in which we are moving.”

— U.S. Supreme Court Justice
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

Justice Holmes's words capture the work of the courts. For the Illinois Judicial Branch, a clear direction is essential. A strategic agenda helps ensure that we continue to move with purpose and remain attentive to the people we serve.

The 2026–2028 Strategic Agenda is the result of months of thoughtful planning by judges, clerks, administrators, lawyers, and community partners from across the state. It presents a shared vision for how the Illinois Judicial Branch can better meet its responsibilities. The agenda calls for procedures that make sense, an approach that anticipates emerging needs, and a justice system committed to fairness, excellence, and equal justice for all.

A primary objective of this agenda is to reduce barriers that hinder individuals from fully participating in their cases. These barriers are familiar: cumbersome procedures, complicated forms, and technological demands. In response, the Illinois Judicial Branch will undertake modernization initiatives, which will include enhancing remote hearing practices, upgrading the digital infrastructure, and increasing support for self-represented individuals.

Justice must be realized in practice, not only in principle, and that requires a system that provides support at every stage.

Lasting progress relies on strong partnerships. The Illinois Judicial Branch collaborates with the bar, legal aid organizations, educators, civic leaders, and government officials at all levels. These relationships give us valuable insight into the challenges communities and litigants face and inform solutions that address those realities. When we work together, we strengthen both the administration of justice and the public trust that underpins our institutions.

Above all, this agenda affirms the direction our courts must follow, reinforcing the Judicial Branch's mission to safeguard rights, uphold the rule of law, and deliver justice that people can understand.

Justice Holmes reminded us that progress is measured by the path we choose. The 2026-2028 Strategic Agenda provides a roadmap for the Illinois Judicial Branch to evolve, adapt, and serve with renewed focus and dedication.

In service to the people of Illinois,
P. Scott Neville, Jr.
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Illinois

MISSION AND VISION

As a separate and co-equal branch of government, the Illinois Judicial Branch is committed to serving the people of Illinois through its mission, vision, and values.

MISSION

To serve the people of Illinois and safeguard the rule of law by delivering justice that is fair, impartial, and accessible to all; upholding the state and federal Constitutions; and earning public trust by treating every person with dignity and respect.

VISION

An Illinois Judicial Branch that sustains our democracy by exemplifying excellence, equity, impartiality, and accountability.

CORE VALUES

FAIRNESS – independent, impartial, and free of bias in actions, decisions, and treatment of all.

ACCOUNTABILITY – transparent and responsible for our conduct, performance, and use of public resources.

INTEGRITY – honest, trustworthy, and committed to excellence and the highest ethical and professional standards.

RESPECT – serve all with dignity, courtesy, compassion, and understanding.

These four words shape every goal, policy, and decision in this plan.

OUR PATH FORWARD

“The golden arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Over the next three years, the Illinois Judicial Conference will oversee task forces and initiatives focusing on modernizing Illinois' legal system, improving the courthouse experience, and demonstrating the Illinois Judicial Branch's commitment to fairness, service, and innovation, including:

- Expanding digital access and fair use of technology
- Simplifying court procedures, forms, and pathways for self-represented litigants
- Strengthening civic education and community dialogue
- Developing more specialized courts and alternatives to litigation
- Expanding access through language and disability accommodations
- Addressing attorney shortages in rural and underserved communities
- Promoting service excellence across the Illinois Judicial Branch

The task forces and initiatives will be responsible for implementing the following five strategic goals.

GOAL 1:

Safeguarding Fairness, Removing Barriers, and Empowering the Self-Represented

GOAL 2:

Resolving Disputes Fairly, Delivering Timely Justice, and Managing Courts Effectively

GOAL 3:

Achieving Excellence through Fairness, Professionalism, and Accountability

GOAL 4:

Strengthen Public Trust by Making the Work of the Courts Visible and Understandable

GOAL 5:

Sustaining Courts Through Fair Funding and Smart Stewardship

GOAL 1

Safeguarding Fairness, Removing Barriers, and Empowering the Self-Represented



A court that promotes fairness by simplifying procedures, supporting self-represented litigants, removing impediments to full participation, and expanding services for people facing barriers.

We will achieve Goal 1 through these strategies:

1. Build a range of assistance options so people without lawyers can navigate cases successfully with digital self-help tools, limited-scope representation, and trained paraprofessionals in certain types of cases.
2. Expand statewide access to legal and related services by fostering strong partnerships with legal aid, community organizations, and pro bono attorneys.
3. Strengthen support for vulnerable populations, including parents and guardians in abuse and neglect cases and others facing behavioral and mental health challenges.
4. Offer alternative options beyond the courthouse so people can connect with information and assistance from their own communities.
5. Provide a family law system that is easier for parents and children to understand and use without professional representation.
6. Harness new technologies, including artificial intelligence and interactive videos, to make legal processes more understandable and manageable, while educating users about the limitations of these tools.
7. Train judges and staff in cultural competence, plain language, and best practices to foster a culture that treats all court users with dignity and respect.
8. Expand equitable access to problem-solving, treatment, and specialty courts so participation does not depend on geography or income.

What This Means

Fairness is a right owed to all who enter a courtroom.

Everyone deserves a clear path to the courthouse door.

We are expanding self-help centers, digital access, and partnerships with community groups so that geography or income never determine justice.



GOAL 2

Resolving Disputes Fairly, Delivering Timely Justice, and Managing Courts Effectively



A court system that resolves disputes fairly and timely through trials, mediation, arbitration, restorative justice, and other effective methods, so that justice is delivered efficiently to all.

We will achieve Goal 2 through these strategies:

1. Operate a modern court system with digital filing, electronic case management, consistent virtual hearing practices, and performance measures that use data to improve fairness, timeliness, and service.
2. Offer multiple ways to resolve disputes, including trials, mediation, arbitration, online processes, and restorative approaches.
3. Provide efficient pathways for lower-dollar and lower-conflict cases so they can be resolved more quickly and simply.
4. Offer court users a reliable online entry point where court users can track their cases and access forms and services.
5. Make fairness visible and measurable through plain-language communication, consistent practices, and user feedback.
6. Improve how collection, eviction, family, juvenile, probate, foreclosure, and other sensitive case types are handled with tailored forms, efficient processes, and trained staff assistance.
7. Encourage full participation for all people, regardless of language or ability, at every stage of the legal process.
8. Promote public confidence by making court processes transparent and keeping parties informed with reminders of deadlines and hearings and notifications of case developments.
9. Strengthen the jury system by broadening who serves, reducing barriers, and making jury duty a positive experience.
10. Adopt policies for artificial intelligence and emerging technologies that protect fairness, privacy, and accountability.

What This Means

Courts serve the public best when justice moves efficiently and fairly.

We are using technology, arbitration, and better case management to shorten timelines while keeping fairness at the center.

When cases move efficiently, public confidence grows.



GOAL 3

Achieving Excellence Through Fairness, Professionalism, and Accountability



A court system distinguished by professional excellence, upholding the highest standards of conduct and using data to achieve fairness and accountability in the administration of justice.

We will achieve Goal 3 through these strategies:

- 1. Maintain a judiciary and workforce committed to the highest standards of ethics, fairness, and professional leadership.**
- 2. Recruit and retain a diverse, inclusive, and highly qualified workforce that reflects a broad range of perspectives and experiences.**
- 3. Foster a culture of civility, respect, and workplace well-being across the court system.**
- 4. Keep judicial codes, conduct rules, and professional standards current with evolving expectations and innovations in justice.**
- 5. Collaborate with bar associations, law schools, and justice partners to promote professionalism and strengthen public trust.**
- 6. Make judicial and staff accountability clear through effective evaluations, fair disciplinary systems, and transparent complaint processes.**
- 7. Promote fairness in criminal proceedings through judicial education that advances awareness of bias and equitable sentencing practices.**
- 8. Demonstrate accountability by publishing information on judicial performance along with ethics oversight and complaint resolution.**
- 9. Guide the responsible and ethical use of new technologies in ways that uphold public confidence.**

What This Means

For the judicial branch, excellence requires seeing justice through the eyes of those we serve.

Judges and staff are expected to model integrity, respect, and professionalism every day.

The public deserves a legal system that is competent, conscientious, and worthy of trust.



GOAL 4

Strengthen Public Trust by Making the Work of the Courts Visible and Understandable



A court system that earns the public's trust by making its work visible and understandable, showing that justice is delivered fairly, and remaining accountable and connected to the communities it serves.

We will achieve Goal 4 through these strategies:

1. Make information regarding the court system available in both the community and online.
2. Publish data on outcomes, including pretrial detention, sentencing, and racial disparities.
3. Engage communities directly through civic education, outreach, and opportunities for dialogue and feedback such as listening sessions and advisory groups.
4. Strengthen partnerships with state and local government leaders and agencies to promote shared understanding, support for the

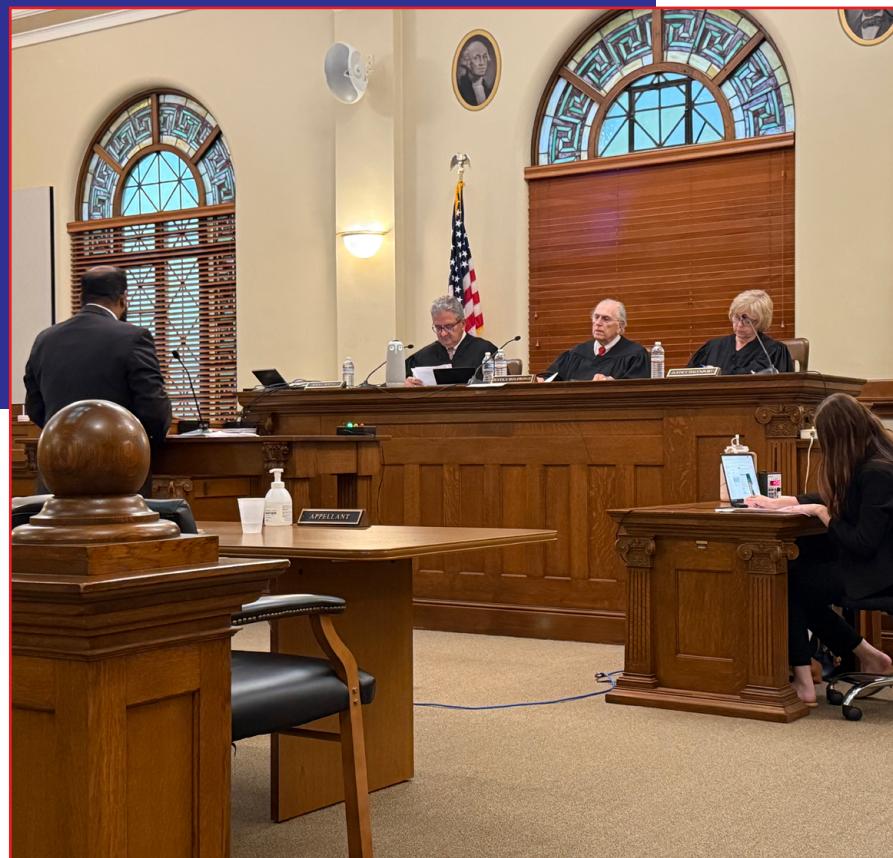
judicial branch, and collaboration on issues impacting courts.

5. Collaborate with schools, civic groups, and media to improve public understanding of how courts work and judicial independence.
6. Show how the courts are performing by publishing regular dashboards with data on timeliness, user experience, and service delivery.
7. Communicate policies and explain their purpose and impact.

What This Means

When the public understands how courts function and why independence matters, trust follows.

The work of the courts must be visible through open data, clear communication, and dialogue.



GOAL 5

Sustaining Courts Through Fair Funding and Smart Stewardship



An independent judiciary sustained by reliable funding, responsible resource management, and a commitment to modernization and innovation, so courts can serve the public effectively.

We will achieve Goal 5 through these strategies:

1. Manage judicial resources responsibly and transparently to meet current needs while planning for future modernization.
2. Build public support for judicial funding by explaining budget priorities and their impact in data-informed ways.
3. Provide equitable levels of funding, staffing, and facilities to enhance court services.
4. Secure resources and partnerships that allow courts to innovate and improve services for the public.
5. Diversify funding through grants, capital planning, and partnerships that strengthen stability and modernization.
6. Invest in juvenile programs and services that reduce reliance on detention and improve outcomes for youth.
7. Enhance funding for indigent defense and problem-solving courts to advance fairness in the criminal justice system.
8. Maintain safe, accessible courthouses and technology systems, with plans for cybersecurity, disaster recovery, and long-term resilience.

What This Means

Fair funding keeps courthouses safe, secure, and accessible.

Working with lawmakers and local governments ensures that the judicial branch has what it needs to serve the public well.

Stewardship is how we protect both justice and taxpayer trust.



ILLINOIS JUDICIAL CONFERENCE MEMBERS

The 2025 members of the Illinois Judicial Conference developed this Strategic Agenda:

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