

The Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award

Nominations Due November 2, 2026

Submit via: <https://forms.gle/pSw64oXKRDsvH5DYA>

The Hon. Thomas L. Kilbride (Ret.) Judicial Access to Justice Award will be given to a member of the judiciary who has made a significant or meaningful contribution to increasing access to the court system by improving the experience of litigants.

This award honors Justice Kilbride, who was elected to the Illinois Supreme Court in 2000 and was elected Chief Justice by his colleagues in 2010. As Chief Justice, he spearheaded efforts to increase access to the court system for all court users. Under his leadership, in June of 2012, 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.

Since its creation, the Commission has taken groundbreaking steps towards achieving equitable justice for all. Three important cornerstones of the Commission's work include initiatives on language access; the publication of plain language statewide standardized forms; and the launch of Illinois Court Help, the Judicial Branch's first statewide legal information hotline. The Commission also drafted the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Plain Language, the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Assistance to Court Users, and the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Remote Court Appearances.

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 launched other innovative programs including video remote interpreting, early resolution programs, and the state's first civil appellate help desk. With Justice Kilbride's assistance, the Commission began a biannual Law Student Leaders Access to Justice Summit – a day focused on educating future leaders about equalizing access to our judicial system in their respective career paths. The Commission has additionally supported the Illinois JusticeCorps program, limited scope representation, and remote appearance 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 undoubtedly paved the way for a more fair, just, and equitable Illinois court system.

To nominate a judge or justice for this award, submit the following information via this electronic form at <https://forms.gle/pSw64oXKRDsvH5DYA> or the QR code by **November 2, 2026**. All questions should be directed to Sarah Song at ssong@illinoiscourts.gov.



The electronic nomination form includes the following questions (to aid in your preparation of the nomination):

1. General information

- a. Nominator Name, Place of Employment, Phone, Email
- b. Nominee Name, Title, Place of Employment, Address, Phone, Email

2. Narrative (500-word maximum)

Please explain why you are nominating this individual. This narrative should include specific examples of how the nominee has made tangible and measurable efforts to improve the experience of litigants who are self-represented, have limited English proficiency, have disabilities, or face barriers to accessing the court system.

Standout nominees will have been involved in efforts to: implement a court-wide innovative program to address specific needs; taken steps to improve the process for litigants; increase litigants' understanding of court processes and procedures; connect litigants with necessary resources regarding substantive areas of the law; provide technology or language support; educate fellow colleagues on access to justice issues; or secure access to legal assistance or representation. The nominee's work will have improved litigants' ability to meaningfully participate in their court cases. While there are no constraints as to how the nominee will have achieved this, it will likely be through a local or statewide program or change at the systemic level.

3. Other Supporting Materials (optional)

- a. Link to LinkedIn Profile
- b. Link to articles featuring the nominee or their work
- c. Nominee short biography (200-word maximum)
- d. Other relevant information

4. Letters of Recommendation (optional, maximum 3) (please submit via email to Sarah Song at ssong@illinoiscourts.gov)

[Current Commissioners](#) of the Commission on Access to Justice and members of the [AOIC Access to Justice Division](#) are not eligible to receive this award.

Former award recipients include Justice Mary K. Rochford, 1st District Appellate Court (2023); Judge Thomas More Donnelly, Circuit Court of Cook County (2024); Chief Administrative Law Judge Brian Weinthal, Illinois Human Rights Commission (2025).