

April 2022

## Nominations Open for the Jeffery D. Colman Access to Justice Award

By: Alison Spanner

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) is requesting nominations for the Jeffery D. Colman Access to Justice Award. Nominations are due to Alison Spanner ([aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov)) by May 9.

This new award will be given to an individual who has made a significant or meaningful contribution to improving access to our court system for litigants who are self-represented, limited English proficient, disabled, or otherwise vulnerable. Please see this [link](#) for more information.

## ATJ at EdCon

By: Jill Roberts



The ATJ Commission and ATJ Division were well represented at the Judicial Education Conference which was held during the first week of April. We had an exhibitor table with educational judicial bench cards, informational signage, and promotional materials for Illinois Court Help (see picture). In addition, the division was involved in the preparation or presentation of several sessions with subjects spanning from remote court appearances to language access. ATJ Division staff and Illinois JusticeCorps fellows led a simulation on navigating legal issues alone.

For those attending the Judicial Education Conference in June, be sure to stop by the ATJ table to say hello and pick up an Illinois Court Help mug and phone wallet. Also, sign up for these ATJ-related sessions:

- Monday 2:45pm - Remote Court Appearances with SRLs
- Thursday 8:30am - Disability Rights in the Courthouse
- Thursday 1:30pm
  - Court Fees & Waivers
  - Virtual Court Proceedings
  - Self-Represented Litigants
- Thursday 3:15pm - Navigating Legal Issues Alone (see photo)
- Friday 8:30am
  - Disability Rights in the Courthouse
  - How to Start an SRL Court Call
- Friday 10:15am - How to Overcome Language Barriers Inside and Outside the Courtroom

Additionally, members of the ATJ Division are available to come to your courthouses and present to any constituency (judges, court staff, clerks, all of the above) on various topics (language access, information vs. advice, dealing with SRLs in the courtroom, etc). Contact Jill Roberts at [jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov) to schedule a training. You can also find our helpful ATJ materials, including judicial bench cards,

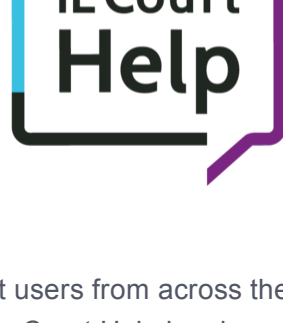
at [https://www.illinoiscourts.gov/public/training-material-and-educational-programs#tab\\_pages-appearance](https://www.illinoiscourts.gov/public/training-material-and-educational-programs#tab_pages-appearance).



## Illinois Court Help Approaches 1 Year Mark

By: Lisa Colpoys

As [Illinois Court Help](#) nears its one-year anniversary on May 17, 2022, we are excited to share court user stories and data that demonstrate the positive impact the service has had on people who use Illinois courts.



Your guide  
through  
the courts

Court users from across the state contact Illinois Court Help by phone, text message, and email to ask questions about court processes, court forms, e-filing, how to find legal help, and more. Some people are seeking instructions to start a small claims case or open a probate estate, while others are involved in cases of crisis like domestic abuse or eviction. Many people reach out more than once for help.

A recent court user who was filing for divorce in DuPage County as a self-represented person spoke with 4 different court guides at various stages of their case to get the required forms, learn about service of process, receive assistance with e-filing, and get help scheduling a court date. They commented that Illinois Court Help guides were "Very helpful! Would have been very hard to navigate representing myself in my divorce without their help!"

By digging into data we can see that in the first 11 months of service, Illinois Court Help's trained **court guides interacted 12,094 times with 7174 individual court users in 98 (of 102) Illinois counties**. About 36% of those interactions were with people in Cook County. We are still waiting for our first contacts from Edwards, Hamilton, Hardin, and Scott counties.

While we offer several communication channels, court users have shown a preference for talking with a court guide by phone. Since the program has launched, two-thirds of all interactions have been by phone, with the remaining one-third evenly split between text messages and email channels.

The vast majority (85%) of people who connected with Illinois Court Help over the past 11 months were self-represented individuals. Family and friends of people with legal problems and members of the public made up 8% of interactions, and nearly 2% were from lawyers and legal professionals.

The top issues that people sought help with are court processes, court forms, and filing or e-filing documents. 87% of interactions related to a civil court case, while 4% related to criminal cases and 2% to traffic cases. Approximately 2% of interactions relate to appeals. Of the civil cases, the most prevalent types are small claims, divorce, family, eviction, and probate, in that order.

Feedback received from court users has been overwhelmingly positive. A customer satisfaction survey that asks users to rate their experience as Good ☐ or Bad ☐ has been answered by over 12% of all users, 92% of whom rated their experience as good. Court guides have been described by many users as patient, kind, knowledgeable, and a lifesaver!

In the next several months we will expand the Illinois Court Help service to allow court users to chat in real time with a court guide from our website. We will also explore extending the hours the phone hotline is open to accommodate more callers. We look forward to providing excellent service to more court users in our second year!

## Interpreter Orientation and Exams-Dates to Know

By: Noor Alawawda



The Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) continues to hold orientations and certification exams for the certification of court interpreters. On April 2 and

April 9, we held a virtual two-day orientation. Another virtual two-day orientation will be held on October 15 and 22, both dates must be attended to receive credit. Additionally, two written exam dates will be offered on June 8 and September 14, with a 9am or 12pm time slot available. Alternatively, a written exam date will be offered in early December to accommodate the October orientation candidates.

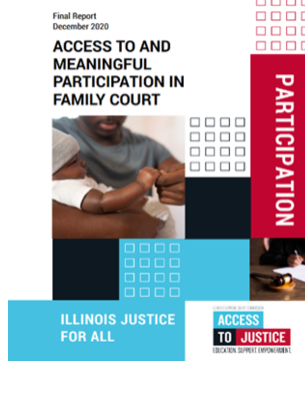
On April 13, a Zoom Q&A was held for those signed up for the April 22 oral exam date. The Zoom Q&A offered a brief overview of the oral exam as well as an opportunity to ask questions. We will be offering two more oral exam dates later this year, July 22 and October 21. Future dates for skill buildings will be posted in June, which strive to help prepare interpreters for the oral exam and improve their skills. Contact Noor Alawawda at [nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov) for questions about orientation, written exams, or oral exams.

## Justice For All Grant Update

By: Jill Roberts



In October of 2019, the ATJ Division and the ATJ Commission were awarded a grant from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) as part of its Justice for All (JFA) project. To fulfill the grant, the ATJ Commission formed a Steering Committee and an Advisory Committee. The committees completed a final report, titled *Access to and Meaningful Participation in Family Court*, which can be found online [here](#).



The grant project engaged approximately 230 people. Based on their input, the Advisory Committee identified 20 recommendations

for change in family law cases involving

children. Some of the recommendations will be addressed in the future by the ATJ Commission. However, some of the recommendations for changes call for more immediate action.

For the next phase of the project, the ATJ Division and ATJ Commission will seek to expand self-represented parents' and guardians' understanding of family court practices and policies related to children's issues, and to assist them to better prepare for court proceedings should they seek judicial resolution for those issues. We have been working on those issues since April 2021. That work will continue officially through June 2022 when the grant year comes to an end.

However, the work started under the JFA grant will continue with the support of the ATJ Commission into the foreseeable future. Stay tuned in the next newsletter for the report on the second year of the JFA grant.

## ATJ Division Updates

By: Alison Spanner

I am pleased to share the following staffing changes within the Access to Justice Division, AOIC.

First, in recognition of her years of leadership and innumerable skills, Jill Roberts has been promoted to Deputy Director of the Access to Justice Division. In this role, she will continue to provide her unquestionable guidance to many projects and take on several more, including standardized forms, Illinois Court Help, legal technology initiatives, court staff education, Court Navigator Network, and Community Trust. She will also take a more central role in policy making for the Division and ATJ Commission.

Next, Kathryn Hensley has been promoted to Supervising Senior Program Manager due to her outstanding management of the Appellate Resource Program and the Illinois Supreme Court Volunteer Pro Bono Program for Criminal Appeals. In addition to those programs, in this role, she will manage the standardized forms program and will direct her talents towards execution of the Illinois's Justice for All Report, which focuses on empowering parents and guardians who seek the assistance of the court regarding family law issues. Developing a program from scratch is one of the hardest tasks asked of anyone in the Division, but through the success of the Appellate Resource Program, Kathryn has demonstrated her ability to wrangle nebulous projects and refine them.

Finally, Sarah Song also received a promotion to Supervising Senior Program Manager. In this role, she will continue to dedicate most of her time to addressing issues with e-filing and supporting other legal technology initiatives like Online Dispute Resolution. She will also continue to staff the Illinois Judicial Conference Task Forces including the Court Operations During COVID-19 Task Force and Remote Proceedings Task Force. With this promotion, she has been asked to lend her excellent judgment to the ATJ Commission's Community Trust Committee.

Please join me and the rest of the Division's talented staff—Lisa Colpoys, Noor Alawawda, Israel Putnam, Lekisha Gunn, Helen Doig, Jess Acosta, Brittany Underwood, and Nina Wilson—in congratulating Jill, Kathryn, and Sarah in their promotions. Special thanks are owed to Director Marcia M. Meis for her endless support of the ATJ Division.

For more information about the ATJ Commission's work, please contact Alison Spanner at [aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:aspanner@illinoiscourts.gov)

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