

# ACCESS TO JUSTICE

EDUCATION. SUPPORT. EMPOWERMENT.

## Access to Justice Articles January-June 2025

### Illinois Court Help Celebrates Four Years of Empowering Court Users | May 2025



Illinois Court Help (ILCH) proudly celebrated its fourth anniversary on May 17, 2025, marking four impactful years of serving Illinois court users. Since its inception, ILCH has provided essential support to over 72,500 individuals, ensuring statewide access to court-related guidance and resources. The service has significantly improved the court experience for self-represented litigants, offering clarity and assistance on complex legal processes across all 102 counties in Illinois.

Reflecting its commitment to innovation and enhanced accessibility, ILCH launched Lex, a cutting-edge chatbot, in January 2025. Lex provides 24/7 assistance, enabling users to receive immediate answers to common court-related queries at their convenience. This expansion complements ILCH's already robust service delivery channels, making support accessible day and night and reinforcing its dedication to meeting court users' evolving needs.

Court users connect with ILCH through various channels, with 73.6% opting for phone support, 13.7% by text messaging, 12.1% by email, and 0.6% via Lex. This variety underscores ILCH's dedication to providing accessible, user-friendly options tailored to the convenience and comfort of Illinois residents. ILCH's dedication to excellent customer

service is reflected with a high satisfaction rating, with 94.1% of users reporting positive experiences.



Testimonials from court users vividly illustrate ILCH's substantial impact across Illinois. A Cook County user navigating a divorce shared: "Fast response to calls. Competent staff. Polite, respectful, and attentive. I would say it's the best helping resource." Another individual from Kankakee County, dealing with an eviction issue, described the ILCH team as "Super nice, friendly, knowledgeable, patient, and easy to talk to." A court user in Tazewell County, who had a family member in a criminal felony case, commented, "The gentleman I spoke with was extremely helpful!" Additionally, a DuPage County user in a family law matter appreciated the convenience, stating, "The quality was very professional! I was given very helpful answers. Very appreciative of this opportunity. I'm also thankful that I am not put on hold via a phone call."

Looking forward, ILCH continues to prioritize accessibility, innovation, and user satisfaction, reinforcing its role as a vital support system for court users throughout Illinois. For assistance, contact Illinois Court Help's hotline at 833-411-1121, open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Users can also send messages or access Lex directly on the ILCH website at [ilcourthelp.gov](https://ilcourthelp.gov).

## “Your Rights When Accessing Illinois Courts”: Commission on Access to Justice Announces New Resource | May 2025

By: August Hieber, Senior Program Manager, ATJ Division

In May 2025, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) approved and published “Your Rights When Accessing Illinois Courts”, a new resource for court users in Illinois.

Developed with the Racial Equity Subcommittee of the Community Trust Committee of the ATJ Commission, this resource contains information for court users about going to court, requesting fee waivers, requesting court interpreters and court forms in languages other than English. The resource informs the public that all court users have the right to ask the court to waive fees, request to attend court remotely, and start or respond to a court case, regardless of immigration status. The flyer also directs court users to [Illinois Court Help](#), which connects people to information needed to go to court and does not collect immigration information.

When uncertain, the public can count on this resource to know what they can ask for and what rights they can count on when accessing Illinois state courts. This resource is available in [English](#), [Arabic](#) (العربية), [Chinese](#) (漢語), [Korean](#) (한국어), [Polish](#) (Polski), [Spanish](#) (Español), and [Russian](#) (Русский).

To request print copies of this resource, or for any further questions, please contact August Hieber, Sr. Program Manager, at [ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov).



**ACCESS TO JUSTICE**  
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### Your Rights When Accessing Illinois Courts

No matter your immigration status, you have the right to:

- Interpreters and language access services**
  - Illinois courts are responsible for providing free interpreters for people who use a language other than English.
  - Let court staff know the language you speak (or sign) and the date, time, and location of your court date. You can request an interpreter with the form available at: [ilcourts.info/language-access](#)
- Get forms in languages other than English**
  - Statewide court forms are available at [ilcourts.info/forms](#), and several are available in Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Korean. You must submit them to the court in English.
  - Circuit clerks can provide copies of forms and explain them, but they cannot give legal advice.
- Ask the court to waive your fees**
  - A fee waiver is a court order that waives (or removes) fees for a case. A judge will approve a fee waiver application based on your financial situation, NOT your immigration status.
  - The civil fee waiver form is available at [ilcourts.info/fee-waiver-forms](#) in English, Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Korean. The criminal fee waiver is available in English at [ilcourts.info/crim-fee-waiver](#).
- Request to attend court remotely (by video or phone)**
  - Anyone involved in a court case can request to attend court remotely, regardless of immigration status.
  - More information about remote court appearances can be found at [ilcourts.info/remote-resources](#). Contact your local circuit clerk at [ilcourts.info/clerks](#) to learn how to request a remote appearance, or ask for one at your first court date.
- Start or respond to an Illinois court case**
  - You do not need to share your immigration status to start a case (ex: petition for an order of protection) or to respond to a case (ex: defend against an eviction).
- Call Illinois Court Help for legal information and help with forms**
  - Illinois Court Help shares information you need to go to court. It's a free service and does not collect immigration information.
  - Call or text (833) 411-1121 or visit [ilcourthelp.gov](#)

Rev. 5/2025

## Ten Years of the Safe Harbor Policy | April 2025

*By: Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division*

In April 2015, the Illinois Supreme Court adopted the *Illinois Supreme Court [Policy on Assistance to Court \[Users\] by Court Clerks, Court Staff, Law Librarians, and Court Volunteers](#)*, referred to as the “Safe Harbor Policy.” The policy was developed by the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) and its Court Guidance & Training Committee (consisting of judges, clerks, and law librarians across the state) in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC). Illinois was one of the first states to adopt such a policy and is now a model used by numerous states as they create similar policies in their jurisdictions.

Since 2015, the policy itself has been updated twice, first to include information about e-filing and most recently to use more plain language, like replacing “patron” with “user” and utilizing gender neutral terms rather than “he or she.” Additional terms were defined, including “court volunteer” and “Limited English Proficient (LEP) person.” To that end, allowable services to LEPs are explained. Lastly, the policy was rearranged to make it easier to understand and to have a better flow of information. To supplement the policy, other resources are available for clerk and court staff to use, including a [guide](#), a [desk card](#), and a public facing [sign](#).

The purpose of the policy is to guide circuit clerks, law librarians, and other frontline court personnel about the assistance they can provide to court users, especially those trying to navigate the court system without a lawyer. Illinois Court Help Guide and former Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator Frances Paparigian of Lake County said, “Self-Represented Litigants in court oftentimes feel like they have been thrown into a complicated game in which they don’t know the rules, and no one will explain them. The Safe Harbor policy gives me and other court personnel the confidence to be able to provide the rules and even the playing field for SRLs. The Safe Harbor Policy is an essential component of access to justice.”

Court personnel are encouraged to offer the full array of services described in section (c) of the policy, including:

- Providing information about court rules, terminology, and procedures and docket information;
- Informing users of the process for requesting an interpreter, reasonable accommodation, or fee waiver;
- Assisting with every step of the e-filing process, including selecting case types and filing codes;

- Giving out approved forms and explaining how to fill them out; and
- Referring to legal aid or other free or low-cost lawyer services, web-based services, libraries, alternative dispute resolution services, domestic violence resources, etc.

Illinois JusticeCorps program staff at the Illinois Bar Foundation, Jenna Kearns, relayed that “Illinois JusticeCorps has trained hundreds of volunteers on the Safe Harbor Policy. Understanding the difference between legal advice and legal information allows our volunteers to confidently provide crucial information and resources to the people who really need help handling their legal issues. It has been an invaluable resource in serving the public.”

The policy specifically states that all providing the permitted services does not constitute the unauthorized practice of law. Staff and volunteers should feel secure and protected when providing the assistance listed because it is specifically authorized. Madison County’s Law Librarian stated, “Over the last ten years, the Safe Harbor Policy has served as a day-to-day operating manual guiding the work we do in our Legal Self-Help Center. The policy has expanded opportunities for court staff to provide legal information to Self-Represented Litigants without fear of practicing law [without a license].”

The Access to Justice Division of the AOIC offers training on this topic at least once a year to the Court Navigator Network. In addition, the topic is often included in various presentations each year, and it is part of the SRL-related topics offered in conjunction with the Illinois Judicial College. Since this topic applies to all clerks, court staff, and volunteers, we also provide in-person and virtual training to court houses upon request.



**Illinois Supreme Court Policy**  
**On Assistance to Court Users by Circuit Clerks,**  
**Court Staff, Law Librarians,**  
**and Court Volunteers**  
**(“Safe Harbor Policy”)**

Since the adoption of the Safe Harbor Policy a decade ago, thousands of court users have been helped by local court and circuit clerk staff, Illinois JusticeCorps Fellows, and Illinois Court Help Guides to navigate the court system. Thank you to the Illinois Supreme Court for adopting the policy, and to all of you for providing critical services to court users to help achieve fair and efficient resolution of their cases.

If you are interested in training on this topic or for any questions or additional information, reach out to [AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov).

## ATJ Commission Awards Grants to Agencies to Reduce Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court | April 2025

*By: Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division*

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice recently launched a new grant opportunity: Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Access in Court Grant. The grant aims to directly support organizations working on the front lines to break down barriers to the legal system. The grant is open to a wide range of participants, including administrative agencies, universities, foundations, legal aid organizations, community-based organizations, and social service organizations.

The ATJ Commission's Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Access in Court grant selection committee had the difficult task of reviewing applications from 33 amazing agencies doing incredible work to advance access to justice across Illinois. The ATJ Commission distributed \$300,000, and fully or partially funded 11 projects from across the state. This year's grantees are:

- [Administer Justice](#) to open three new community-based legal clinics.
- [Catholic Charities Legal Services](#) to establish a legal service hotline in Central and Southern Illinois.
- [Center for Disability and Elder Law](#) to support the Legal Help Desk at the Cook County Clerk's Office Recording Division.
- [Chicago Volunteer Legal Services](#) to continue a family law legal clinic in Cook County's Maywood Courthouse.
- [Greater Chicago Legal Clinic](#) to run a weekly advice desk at Cook County's Bridgeview Courthouse.
- Illinois Equal Justice Foundation to run the [Illinois Armed Forces Legal Aid Network](#).
- [Lawndale Christian Legal Center](#) to provide holistic, community-based legal services to juveniles and emerging adults.
- [Palomares Social Justice Center](#) to provide bilingual assistance to the Hispanic community in Rock Island County and the Quad Cities.
- [Raise the Floor Alliance](#) to expand efforts to address labor violations for workers in low-wage industries.
- [Sandoval Public Library](#) to create a self-help legal workstation.
- [South Suburban College](#) to support the Student Pro Bono Expungement and Entrepreneurship Practicum.

Through partnership and shared commitment, we are building a more just, inclusive, and accessible court system for all. The Commission is proud to support the efforts of these

vital organizations for the program year from May 1, 2025 to April 30, 2026. For any questions or additional information, reach out to [AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov).

## Increasing Court Access Through Local Libraries | April 2025

*By: Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division*

On Friday, April 25, 2025, community partners gathered at the Glenview Public Library for an official launch of the Court Library Access Center Program. The program was first featured in September via this [press release](#). Friday's program was moderated by Bob Glaves, Executive Director of the Chicago Bar Foundation, and featured Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth Rochford; Judge Jill Cerone Marise, Presiding Judge of Rolling Meadows, Circuit Court of Cook County; Cook County Commissioner Scott Britton; Judge Jorge Ortiz, Circuit Judge in the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Chair of the Access to Justice Commission; and Lindsey Dorfman, Executive Director of the Glenview Public Library.



All speakers shared remarks about how essential libraries are to the community and that by training trusted librarians to provide court information at the libraries, more people can get needed information without having to travel to a courthouse.

The Court Library Access Center pilot program utilizes the state's public libraries to improve court access to offer guidance for Illinoisans struggling to navigate the legal system on their own. The goal of the pilot is to help people without lawyers — who may have limited technology capabilities or transportation challenges — more easily access legal information and assistance at their local public library.

This program demonstrates the power of strong partnerships. Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias' office and the State Library partnered with the Chicago Bar Foundation and the Illinois Supreme Court's Commission on Access to Justice to establish Court Access Library Centers in 18 public libraries. As part of this program, each library offers



space and dedicated equipment for residents without lawyers to appear in court remotely, obtain legal information and resources, and e-file and access court documents online.

The librarians at all pilot library locations have received training on Illinois Courts, Safe Harbor Policy (what is allowable legal information), e-filing, statewide standardized court forms, remote appearances, referrals, and resources. Librarians could also opt-in to be a certified Court Library Navigator. Court Library Navigators are receiving additional training on common SRL case types such as divorce and family law, protective orders, public benefits, probate, small claims, and more.

For more information, or to put your local library on a list for future expansion of the program, please reach out to Roya Samarghandi at the Chicago Bar Foundation at [rsamarghandi@chicagobarfoundation.org](mailto:rsamarghandi@chicagobarfoundation.org).

### **ATJ Commission Hosts Law Student Leaders Access to Justice Summit | March 2025**

On February 28, 2025, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice hosted its third iteration of the Law Student Leaders Access to Justice Summit, which was graciously hosted by Jenner & Block LLP. The Commission hosted 72 law student leaders from our nine Illinois law schools, Illinois JusticeCorps Fellows, Illinois Court Help Guides, and law school faculty to the Summit. The Summit was attended by members of the judiciary, representing the Supreme Court, Appellate Court, and Circuit Court of Cook County.

The program began with a moving welcome from Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis, who was introduced by Melissa Root, Managing Partner of Jenner & Block's Chicago office.

The event included numerous panels and discussions from distinguished faculty. Samira Nazem from the National Center for State Courts provided an overview of state courts and access to justice initiatives and strategies. A diverse group of panelists representing various professional pathways then spoke on career paths for access to justice. The discussion involved mentorship and relationship building, pro bono work in private practice, barriers legal aid clients face in achieving access to justice, and tips on managing self-care in the legal profession.

Attendees then heard from Justice David Overstreet, the Supreme Court's liaison to the Commission, who gave an inspiring lunch keynote. Justice Overstreet was joined by Justice Joy Cunningham, who participated in the networking lunch. Attendees were assigned to lunch tables organized in six general areas ranging from big law, criminal defense, legal aid, government, clerkships, and solo practice. Numerous judges and attorneys volunteered to



participate in the lunch programming.



The afternoon included a panel on technology and access to justice, which focused on how technology can help increase access to resources for SRLs, how court systems use technology to manage processes and assist stakeholders, the use of technology by legal aid organizations to streamline work, the ways in which pro bono attorneys can be trained and work more efficiently using technological innovations, and the professional responsibility and ethical implications of AI.

The afternoon programming concluded with a self-represented litigant simulation and debrief led by Judge Jorge L. Ortiz, Chair of the ATJ Commission, and Jill Roberts from the AOIC's ATJ Division. The simulation explored the reality of someone living in poverty who is experiencing housing insecurity and involvement in the court system. Attendees went through the simulation and then participated in an engaging discussion about procedural fairness, bias, and what they might be able to do in their future legal career to help close the justice gap.

More information about the Summit, including the agenda and photos, can be found on the Commission's [website](#).

### **Advancing Fairness and Respect: New Bench Cards Support Gender Inclusivity in Illinois Courts | March 2025**

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) continues its commitment to fostering dignity, respect, and equitable treatment for all court users. To support this mission, the Commission is reviewing newly developed Gender Inclusive

Bench Cards, which provide practical guidance for judges and court personnel on engaging respectfully with transgender individuals in the courtroom.

### Why gender inclusivity matters in courtrooms

Transgender individuals are present in every Illinois community -- as court users, attorneys, clerks, and even judges. However, studies reveal that transgender people frequently face discrimination and misgendering in court settings, eroding public trust in the legal system. According to a 2022 report from Lambda Legal, more than half of transgender, gender-nonconforming, and nonbinary individuals with courtroom experience reported being misgendered by court staff. This mistreatment contributes to a broader perception that courts are not safe or accessible spaces for all.

The National Center for State Courts also emphasizes the impact of language, stating that using gender-inclusive terminology measurably improves individuals' interactions with the court and enhances public confidence in the judiciary.

### What the new bench cards offer

The Gender Inclusive Bench Cards provide two key resources for judges and court staff:



**ILLINOIS JUDICIAL BRANCH**  
**Bench Card: Transgender People at Court**  
NOV. 2024 v. 1

Transgender (or trans) people can be found in every community in Illinois. There are transgender court users, employees, judges, and lawyers who work at or go to the courthouse every day.

- Gender identity** is an internally held concept of self that indicates how a person perceives themselves and can be based on sex (biological characteristics like chromosomes and phenotypes) and gender norms (the rules and expectations society holds regarding gender identity and expression).
- Transgender** people are those who do not identify with the gender identity they were assigned at birth.
- Cisgender** people are those who identify with the gender identity they were assigned at birth.

Judges must foster an inclusive, safe court environment where transgender people are not threatened, singled out, or discriminated against. Judges and their staff should learn about the specific considerations transgender people experience to further foster a respectful, safe, inclusive court environment. Judges must actively prevent and address any form of discrimination in the courtroom, including disrespectful behavior, whether it comes from court staff, lawyers, or others.

**Judicial Duty to Extend Respect and Dignity to Transgender People**

Judges have an ethical duty to extend respect and dignity, impartiality, and fairness to transgender people. [Code of Judicial Conduct](#).

**Canon 2, Rule 2.3(B):** A judge shall not, in the performance of judicial duties, by words or conduct manifest bias or prejudice or engage in harassment, including but not limited to bias, prejudice, or harassment based upon...gender identity...

**Canon 1, Rule 1.2:** A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.

**Canon 2, Rule 2.2:** A judge shall uphold and apply the law and shall perform all duties of judicial office fairly and impartially.

For information on gender inclusive language, writing, and practices, please see [Illinois Judicial Bench Card: Promoting Gender Inclusivity at Court](#). For more information on addressing bias in court, please see [Illinois Judicial Bench Card: Achieving Fairness Free of Unconscious Bias](#).

**A Note about Lawyers:**

Misgendering can be a form of discrimination. According to the [Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct](#), which guide the practice of law, lawyers are instructed to treat their clients with respect and provide effective assistance of counsel. Lawyers are in violation of the ethical rules if they intentionally misgender their clients or other case participants.

Judges should correct this behavior. For example: "Counsel, the petitioner uses she/her pronouns. Please refer to her correctly."

Judges should avoid, prevent, address, and stop instances of bias, prejudice, or harassment based on gender identity in court.

**What could bias or discrimination look like?**

- Treating a person differently because they are transgender or treating a person differently after assuming they are transgender.
- Purposely using a person's **deadname** (the name they no longer use) or **misgendering** them (using inaccurate pronouns) in court or when speaking about them to others.
- Writing about a transgender person using gendered language and pronouns that do not align with the person's gender identity.

All materials referenced in this bench card, as well as sample resources and referral sheets, can be found at: [ilcourts.info/allATJ](#)



**ILLINOIS JUDICIAL BRANCH**  
**Bench Card: Promoting Gender Inclusivity at Court**  
NOV. 2024 v. 1

**Language, Dignity, and Respect in Court**

Per the Code of Judicial Conduct, court proceedings are required to be inclusive, respectful, and free from harassment or discrimination. By using a person's correct title, name, and pronouns, judges can create welcoming court environments, promote fairness and equality, and build trust. Gender-inclusive language helps judges correctly address court users and staff, lawyers, and other judges, thereby affirming identity and dignity for all.

**What are pronouns?**

Pronouns are simply words used as substitutes for nouns. Personal pronouns are substitutes for names or nouns referring to people and are often gendered.

**Examples of personal pronouns:**  
She/her/hers – feminine gender  
He/him/his – masculine gender  
They/them/theirs – gender neutral

Pronouns are never preferred, but rather just are and should be respected as part of a person's identity. Pronouns can represent the gender binary, be gender neutral, or a mix of both (e.g., she/they).

**Gender Binary:** understanding and describing a person's gender in terms of the categories of "man/masculine" or "woman/feminine."

**Gender Neutral:** not using gender to describe someone (e.g., "person" instead of "man" or "woman."

All people use pronouns in language to refer to themselves and refer to others. Transgender people are not the only people who use pronouns. Cisgender people do also. If you are uncomfortable using a person's correct pronouns, use the person's name instead of using a pronoun in place of the name.

**How to Share Pronouns**

You might think you can assume a person's pronouns based on their appearance, but the only way to be certain of this information is if the person tells you. If you do not know the person's pronouns, use their name instead.

Sharing your own pronouns is one way to signal that it is safe for another person to share their pronouns with you if they wish. Here are places you could share your pronouns:

**During your court call:** "Good morning, everyone, my name is Judge Doe and I use she/her pronouns."

**In your Zoom name:** You can personalize your Zoom name to include your pronouns. Sign in to the Zoom web portal. In the navigation panel, click Profile. On the right side of your name, click Edit. In the Pronouns field, enter your pronouns. In the "How would you like to share your pronouns?" drop-down field, choose an option. Click Save.

**Examples include:**  
Judge Jane Doe (she/her)  
Judge Sam Doe, they/them  
Judge Jack Doe - he/him

**On your bench name placard:** Consider personalizing a permanent part of your desk to share your pronouns with people in your courtroom.

**In your email signature:**  
Judge Chris A. Doe  
Pronouns: he/him/his  
Circuit Judge

**Note:** Pronouns are used in languages other than English too. When considering how to share your pronouns, consider incorporating pronouns in languages used by the communities you serve.

**Examples of pronouns in English and Spanish:**  
She/her/ella  
He/him/él  
They/them/elle

**Sharing Pronouns creates an inclusive environment for transgender court users**

For more information, please see, [Illinois Judicial Bench Card: Transgender People at Court](#).

For more information on addressing bias in court, please see [Illinois Judicial Bench Card: Achieving Fairness Free of Unconscious Bias](#).

All materials referenced in this bench card, as well as sample resources and referral sheets, can be found at: [ilcourts.info/allATJ](#)

- [Transgender People at Court](#) – This guide outlines judicial obligations and offers actionable steps for ensuring transgender court users are treated with dignity and respect. It includes guidance on appropriate interactions and examples of how to navigate gender identity considerations in court settings.
- [How to Promote Gender Inclusivity](#) – This resource highlights best practices for using inclusive language, such as the correct use of pronouns, strategies for addressing mistakes, and how to ensure court communications — including signage, forms, and instructions — are gender-inclusive.

These bench cards align with the ATJ Commission's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, which envisions a more accessible and equitable court system. The plan specifically calls for initiatives that ensure all court users feel welcomed and respected and that court communications use clear, inclusive, and person-centered language.

### *A step toward a more inclusive court system*

The ATJ Commission would like to acknowledge the work of its Gender Inclusivity Subcommittee of the Community Trust Committee. This Subcommittee collaborated with various stakeholders to develop these resources, including the Pride Action Tank of Chicago, the Illinois Supreme Court Committee on Equal Justice, and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts.

To explore the work of the ATJ Commission further, please visit [www.atjil.org](http://www.atjil.org).

## **Meet Lex: Illinois Court Help's Chatbot – January 2025**

We are thrilled to announce that Lex, Illinois Court Help's chatbot, is now live! Lex is here to make accessing court information easier than ever by guiding court users step-by-step to the resources they need.

We are incredibly grateful for the valuable feedback we received during user testing at Trinity United Church of Christ which helped us refine Lex before launch. Many participants shared that they felt empowered while using Lex — a sentiment that perfectly captures our mission to support court users.

"The best part of our job is getting to help people, and Lex will allow us to help more court users on their own time as it will be available 24/7." – Helen D., Sr. Court Guide

"Demand for Illinois Court Help's services continues to expand and using Lex to help meet this is an exciting opportunity for growth. It's a project that helps meet a current need and will be continually improved with time and gained knowledge of court user needs." – Sara S., Sr. Court Guide

### **Illinois Court Help**

#### **ILCH's Chat Bot**

Hi! I am Lex, your virtual court guide. I can assist you in navigating the state court system by offering self-help resources and guidance to empower you. I cannot provide legal advice or act as a lawyer. How I can help you today?



We will continue to build out Lex and add more features to enhance its usability. For further updates and to access Lex, visit [ilcourthelp.gov](https://ilcourthelp.gov).

## **ATJ Commission Awards Grants to Local Courts to Improve Disability Access Jan. 2025**

*By August Hieber, Senior Program Manager,*

On December 26, 2024, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice announced the grantees of the inaugural Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant. Interest in the first year of the grant was tremendous; the Commission received 54 applications requesting nearly \$6.5 million in funding. All applicants expressed a need, and disability accessibility improvements are always critical components of ensuring equal access to courts.

The Commission distributed \$600,000, and fully or partially funded 31 projects from local courts that promote dignity, advance accessibility, and reduce barriers to equal access to courts for people with disabilities. This year's grantees are:

- Adams County, to purchase new accessible courtroom chairs
- Alexander County, to construct two accessible bathrooms
- Bond County, to install a vertical platform lift for access to the front entrance of the courthouse
- Brown County, to construct an accessible jury box
- Carroll County, to replace two chair lifts
- Clark County, to purchase a wheelchair and walker for onsite use; to pay for the annual elevator maintenance fee and a wheelchair lift
- Clinton County, to construct an accessible jury box (see image of the completed ramp)
- Cook County, to provide staff with mental health responsiveness training and training for staff regarding creating accessible digital documents
- Cumberland County, to construct an accessible jury box and witness stand and purchase an accessible desk
- Ford County, to purchase braille signage
- Greene County, to remodel the Probation Department office to be accessible, including bathrooms
- Grundy County, to purchase a new traditional doorknob
- Henderson County, to install an ADA-accessible counter desk and remodel accessible second floor bathrooms
- Jefferson County, to install an exterior ramp
- Jo Daviess County, to construct an accessible courthouse bathroom

- Kane County, to purchase a wheelchair and to install accessible interior and exterior signage
- Kendall County, to repair ramps, sidewalks, and handrails
- Lake County, to purchase a mobility scooter and funds for CART and court report transcripts
- Madison County, to purchase courthouse signage in braille
- Marion County, to construct an accessible jury box and install ramps for the jury box, witness stand, and law library
- Mason County, to construct an accessible jury box and replace chairs in courtroom
- McDonough County, to install ADA-accessible counters
- Menard County, to conduct an ADA assessment
- Peoria County, to conduct an ADA assessment
- Pope County, to purchase elevator parts and pay for replacement labor
- Randolph County, to purchase new chairs for the jury room
- Saline County, to purchase ramps for the witness stand and jury box and repair elevator
- Stark County, to conduct an ADA assessment
- Stephenson County, to construct an accessible basement bathroom
- Williamson County, to purchase large print and braille signage
- Winnebago & Boone Counties, to construct an accessible all-gender bathroom

All applicants, including projects that could not be funded this grant cycle, were provided with a resource guide directing them to additional support to address the needs expressed in the applications. If you are interested in this guide, please email August Hieber at [ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov). It includes information such as:

- *Architectural Assessments*: applicants can consider contacting the [Great Lakes ADA Center](#), an organization that is not an enforcement agency and cannot provide legal representation, but they can help locate a specialized architect, find resources in Illinois, and provide confidential, informal guidance on ADA questions and expert referrals. Requests can be made by completing the [online Technical Assistance Request form](#) or by calling 800-949-4232.
- *Signage*: when installing signage, consider font type and size, contrast, color selection, need for braille, and location of the signage. Consider this guide: [Chapter 7: Signs, from the U.S. Access Board](#)) or collaborating with your local disability access groups.
- *Assistive Listening Devices*: assisted listening devices may also be available through the AOIC Language Access Program. Please contact Noor Alawawda at [nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov) to request devices.