

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT:

Recommendations for Planning and Transitioning to New Leadership

A Brief Summary for the Criminal Law Bar

With a new Clerk set to take office following the November 2020 General Election, Chicago Appleseed, Chicago Council of Lawyers and the Civic Federation have released a transition report with recommendations for the next Clerk of the Circuit Court to better serve the public and users of the court system. The recommendations are aimed at improving the functionality of the Clerk's technology systems, improving public access to court data, streamlining operations, and improving coordination with stakeholders and practitioners.

The following are a selected set of recommendations for the next Clerk of particular interest to criminal justice stakeholders:

IMPROVE OVERALL MANAGEMENT

- Conduct an office-wide audit with the goal of reallocating resources to ensure appropriate staffing levels to handle all of Clerk's services, including mandates such as automatic expungement of marijuana cases and juvenile records.
- Establish an emergency remote operation plan while remote hearings continue to be held and in the event of future court closures.

IMPROVE INTEGRATION OF DATA BETWEEN THE CIRCUIT COURT AND OTHER CRIMINAL JUSTICE STAKEHOLDERS

- Assess the status of current data exchanges between the Clerk's Office and other criminal justice stakeholder agencies, ensure that the case management system provides the necessary data, and identify training needs.
- Create a new office of data management, led by a data director, to improve the accuracy of court records, statistics, and case file information and respond to requests for statistical data and court operations data so that stakeholders and the public can assess court performance and case processing outcomes.

MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE CLERK'S CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND E-FILING SYSTEM

- Fully integrate the Clerk's website, case management system and e-filing system to quickly and efficiently pull up docket information and answer questions about cases, communicate information to litigants, attorneys and other stakeholders, and facilitate the tracking and querying of court performance measures.

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL DATA IN PUBLICLY-ACCESSIBLE SYSTEMS

- Implement full public remote online access to the case management system, including scanned and e-filed case documents and orders.
- Provide daily court call information on the Clerk's website that includes each courtroom's daily schedule, cases to be called, hearing times and docket line numbers, so that attorneys and litigants and their families can find court dates and hearing times online.
- Work with the Cook County Chief Judge to install a court recording system in every courtroom.
- Implement court hearing reminders for all litigants in all divisions.
- Work with the Illinois General Assembly to amend State law to make information in the Clerk of the Circuit Court's possession subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act or voluntarily release data and operations information.

The full report can be found at chicagoappleseed.org/2020-clerk-transition-report and civicroad.org/CircuitCourtClerk2020.