

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

FIRST 100 DAYS PROGRESS REPORT

Chicago Appleseed – Chicago Council of Lawyers – Civic Federation
April 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
PROCESS OF CREATING THIS REPORT	5
OVERALL MANAGEMENT	6
1. Office-Wide Audit	6
2. Mission Statement	6
3. Remote Operations Plan	7
TECHNOLOGY	8
5. Functional Case Management System	8
7c. Implement Electronic Order Entry	9
PUBLIC ACCESS TO DATA	10
12. FOIA Transparency	10
13. Voluntarily Release Data	11
ACCESSIBILITY AND USER SERVICES	12
14. Chief Accessibility Officer	12
15. Chief Public Service Officer	12
ETHICS AND OVERSIGHT	13
17. Shakman Oversight Compliance	13
19. Inspector General Oversight	13
20. Execute New Collective Bargaining Agreement	14
BUDGET TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	15
21. Ensure Best Usage of Resources	15
SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS	16





INTRODUCTION

In September 2020, the Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts, Chicago Council of Lawyers and the Civic Federation released *New Directions for the Office of the Clerk of the Cook County Circuit Court: Recommendations for Planning and Transitioning to New Leadership* ahead of the November 2020 general election.¹ The *New Directions* report provided a comprehensive set of recommendations for the Circuit Court Clerk across a variety of areas including management, technology, transparency, ethics and public access. The report included an ambitious timeline of recommendations to be completed within the new officeholder's first 30 days, first six months, and first year in office. Illinois State Senator Iris Martinez was elected and took office as Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County on December 1, 2020.

This report serves as the first of three planned updates on reform initiatives undertaken by the new Clerk, Iris Martinez, within her first 100 days in office (December 1, 2020 through March 10, 2021) and progress made on implementing the recommendations identified in the *New Directions* report. Our coalition intended to complete the first transition report based on the Clerk's first 30 days in office. However, in January 2021 the Clerk's Office said it would need additional time to address immediate operational and management issues inherited from the previous clerk,

as well as the impact of COVID-19, before being able to provide information and answer our questions about the Clerk's initial priorities. Therefore, a 100-day report has been produced in place of the planned 30-day report. After submitting a list of written questions in January 2021 and several follow-up requests for responses to those questions, we received responses on March 31, 2021.

The Clerk did not respond to several requests for a meeting or an invitation to participate in a virtual community forum in connection with this progress report. Because we have not been able to receive firsthand updates from the Clerk, the findings provided in this update are based on information obtained through communications with the Clerk's executive staff, as well as publicly available documents and media reports. The findings are further substantiated through anecdotal information provided by court practitioners, advocates and litigants.

¹ New Directions for the Office of the Clerk of the Cook County Circuit Court from Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts, the Civic Federation, and the Chicago Council of Lawyers is available at <http://www.chicagoappleseed.org/2020-clerk-transition-report> or <https://www.civicfed.org/CircuitCourtClerk2020>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Directions called for a major shift in the Cook County Circuit Court Clerk’s Office, from a culture that serves political and judicial interests to one that efficiently and fairly serves court users (litigants and attorneys) and the general public. We have not yet seen the new administration take adequate steps that would move toward that goal.

We recognize that the Clerk inherited an office with many structural and operational challenges that will require a substantial amount of evaluation and restructuring to fix. Our impression is that, despite ample opportunity between the March 2020 primaries and her swearing-in on December 1, 2020, Clerk Martinez failed to form an effective transition committee or develop a comprehensive transition plan. We are unaware of any organized effort by the Clerk or her staff to establish updated goals and priorities for the office. As discussed below, it appears that the Clerk’s Office has failed to adopt many of the recommendations included in our *New Directions* report as priorities. If any such efforts have taken place, the Clerk’s Office has not communicated its new priorities or initiatives to stakeholders or the public. More importantly, it has not initiated an office-wide audit or comprehensive mission planning effort that would guide such an effort and allow public input into the process.

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts, the Civic Federation, and the Chicago Council of Lawyers recommended in our *New Directions* report that the following initiatives commence within the new Clerk’s first 30 days in office:

Initiatives Recommended within the First 30 Days		
Recommendation	Status	Progress
Office-wide audit to review staffing levels, technology and office functions, and identify efficiencies.	Not Yet Initiated; Preparations Underway	An office-wide audit has not yet been initiated, although the Clerk’s Office says it is working on a Scope of Work with the pro bono consulting firm Civic Consulting Alliance.
Establish a clear mission statement.	Initiated, but Incomplete	The Clerk’s Office updated its mission statement.
Establish an emergency remote operation plan.	Initiated, but Incomplete	The Circuit Court Clerk is working with the Shakman Compliance Administrator on completing a telework policy for employees to work remotely throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Plan to create the following new positions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Accessibility Officer • Chief Public Service Officer • FOIA Officer 	Not Initiated; No Preparations Underway	Plans to hire these three positions have apparently not been initiated.

The *New Directions* report provided 24 recommendations, with suggested timelines for completion within the new Clerk administration's first 30 days, first six months and first year in office.² In addition to the 30-day recommendations above, this 100-day report provides an update on many of the other longer-term recommendations. The recommendations are numbered to align with the corresponding recommendation in the original *New Directions* report. The following is a brief summary of the findings:

Overall Management

- 1. Conduct a complete office audit to identify areas for savings, efficiency improvements, and resource repurposing:** We recommended that the Circuit Court Clerk's Office undertake an office-wide audit to determine appropriate staffing levels, staffing distribution, and areas of potentially greater efficiency. An office-wide audit has not been initiated. The Clerk's Office says it is working on a Scope of Work with the *pro bono* consulting firm Civic Consulting Alliance.
- 2. Establish a clear mission statement:** We recommended that the Clerk's Office establish a new mission statement containing the principles by which it would become a more public-service oriented body. The Clerk's Office slightly modified the language of the previous mission statement but did not engage in a comprehensive mission planning effort or make the new statement public.
- 3. Establish an emergency remote operations plan:** In light of the urgent adaptive needs presented to court operations by the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommended that the Clerk's Office finalize a telework plan in conjunction with the Shakman compliance monitor. The Clerk reports that the plan is nearing approval, but has not been made public.

Technology

- 5. Create a functional case management system:** Among the report's recommendations for technological improvements, we emphasized the need for a well-functioning electronic case management system. The rollout of the new Odyssey case management system has been plagued with errors and delays. The issues predate Clerk Martinez, and her administration has stated it intends to have the new system operational by December 31, 2021. However, we have been granted no insight into the reasons for the current delays or the specific steps the Clerk's Office may be taking to fix them.

² For a list of the recommendations and a suggested timeline for completion, see this [Executive Summary](#) one-pager.

Public Access to Data

- 12. Work with the Illinois General Assembly to amend state statute to make information in the Clerk of the Circuit Court's possession subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act:** The Clerk has reversed her campaign commitment to support state legislation that would make her office subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). She has not initiated any plans to create an Office of Data Management (Recommendation 11) or to hire a FOIA Officer and operate as if the office were subject to FOIA (Recommendation 14). We have not seen any progress toward making data more accessible to researchers, journalists or the public.

Accessibility and User Services

- 14-15. Appoint a Chief Accessibility Officer and a Chief Public Service Officer:** The Clerk has not hired a Chief Accessibility Officer or Chief Public Service Officer, as recommended in *New Directions*. The Clerk's Office has not stated any intention to take significant steps toward improved access for people with disabilities, limited English or limited education.

Ethics and Oversight

- 17. Continue to comply with Shakman Consent Decree requirements:** The Clerk's Office appears to be working effectively with the Shakman monitor, whose last report indicated substantial effort toward eventual full compliance, including recently providing Shakman training for all employees. An amended Employment Plan and list of exempt positions, updated exempt job descriptions, and various other employment policies remain to be finalized.
- 19. Ensure stronger Inspector General oversight:** Contrary to the recommendation in *New Directions*, the Clerk has not agreed to be subject to oversight of the Cook County Office of the Independent Inspector General. The Clerk's Office indicates that it is reviewing opportunities to increase oversight.

Budget Transparency and Accountability

While many of the budget and accountability goals (Recommendations 21-24) set out in *New Directions* are longer-term priorities, they rely on a comprehensive office-wide audit as a first step. As noted, that audit has not begun.



PROCESS OF CREATING THIS REPORT

Between December 2020 and March 2021, representatives from the Civic Federation and Chicago Appleseed reached out to Clerk Martinez and her staff on several occasions seeking a meeting with the Clerk and her senior leadership team. In mid-January the Clerk's executive staff indicated the office would need more time to handle pressing operational issues before being able to meet. However, we have not been able to secure a meeting as of the publication of this report.

On January 12, 2021, the Civic Federation sent a list of written questions to the Executive Clerk of External Affairs, who provided written answers on March 31, 2021. This report is based on those written responses, public information from the Clerk's Office website and the Shakman compliance monitor's reports, and qualitative information from the personal experiences of law practitioners, advocates, and litigants.

Clerk Martinez took office promising to make the office more transparent and responsive to public needs. Such a reorientation of the office is critical. We have, however, seen very limited progress toward that goal in the Clerk's first 100 days. From her office's answers to written questions, it also appears that she has had minimal contact with other interested community and advocacy groups since taking office. We are concerned about this seeming lack of public engagement.

Following is a discussion of the specific recommendations provided by Chicago Appleseed, the Civic Federation and the Chicago Council of Lawyers in *New Directions for the Office of the Clerk of the Cook County Circuit Court: Recommendations for Planning and Transitioning to New Leadership*, released September 2020. This update is designed to promote desired transparency and community responsiveness, and to describe the steps the Clerk's Office has or has not taken toward each.



OVERALL MANAGEMENT

1. Office-Wide Audit

A central recommendation of the *New Directions* report was for the new Clerk to conduct an office-wide audit that would review current operations and staffing levels in order to re-evaluate job descriptions and workloads and to find efficiencies. The audit would also involve evaluating technology and training needs. I Clerk Martinez campaigned on implementing an office-wide audit if elected.

Three months into office, an operational audit has not been initiated by the new Clerk. The Clerk's Office says its focus has been on understanding the management issues inherited from the prior Circuit Court Clerk and on addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the health and safety of employees. However, the Clerk's office has been in touch with the Civic Consulting Alliance about this initiative and a Scope of Work for an audit is in progress.

An office-wide audit is critical to understand the current use of resources and identify areas that could be streamlined. The audit should review existing programs, staffing levels, job descriptions, operations, expenditures, technology requirements and workforce and training needs. Ideally, the audit would enable the Clerk to right-size staffing levels and modernize positions to improve inadequate services including accessibility, court user services and public data access. The Clerk should move forward on this analysis without delay.

2. Mission Statement

The *New Directions* report suggested that the Clerk produce a revised mission statement that goes beyond a description of the Circuit Court Clerk's required responsibilities to establish guiding principles by which the office will serve the court's numerous stakeholder groups including litigants, judges, attorneys, researchers, journalists and the general public.

The Clerk's Office provided the following revised mission statement:

The mission of the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County is to provide the citizens of Cook County and the participants in the judicial system an efficient, technological and transparent court system. The Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County will provide all services, information and court records with exceptional service and a workforce that represents the communities of Cook County.

The previous mission statement was:

The mission of the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County is to serve the citizens of Cook County and the participants in the judicial system in an efficient, effective and ethical manner. All services, information and court records will be provided with courtesy and cost efficiency.

The new mission statement changes some words, which, according to the Clerk's staff, is intended to reflect the need for the office to move forward on technology and a culture change. It does not address *how* the Clerk's office will serve participants in the judicial system or what principles guide the office in carrying out its mission. The mission statement does not appear to be posted publicly online.

We encourage the Clerk to begin a true mission planning process—including gathering feedback from all stakeholders and the public—to establish guiding goals, principles and values for future priorities and policies. Much of the value of a mission statement is in the process of completing it. That process should be open, transparent and considerate of input from communities and professionals whose lives and jobs are affected by the Clerk's Office's operations.

The mission statement and accompanying principles should be posted prominently on the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County's website.

3. Remote Operations Plan

The most recent report of the Shakman Compliance Administrator for the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, filed in January 2021, reports that the new Clerk of the Circuit Court is cooperating with the Compliance Administrator on finalizing a Telework Policy.³ The Circuit Court Clerk, according to the report, indicated the need to facilitate and increase remote working by employees as long as the pandemic remains active, and acknowledged the need for written telework procedures and implementing forms. The Compliance Administrator said the policy was nearly complete and expected successful implementation. The Clerk's Office confirms that it is working with the Shakman Compliance Administrator on finalizing the Telework Plan and is awaiting final approval.

The proposed Telework Plan is not yet publicly available and, therefore, we are unable to comment on whether it achieves significant efficiencies or fairness in which employees are allowed to telework. More importantly, we are unable to comment on whether the new Telework Plan will improve the Clerk's Office's service to litigants and attorneys, which has lagged considerably during the pandemic.

3 Sixth Report of Susan G. Feibus as Compliance Administrator for the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, filed January 21, 2021, available at https://28deecac3-bfc7-4d05-9f05-d09ff9a915d3.filesusr.com/ugd/11c424_de646dded9a849bf9f21081ae8e72fef.pdf





TECHNOLOGY

5. Functional Case Management System

The *New Directions* report included a number of recommendations to address the pressing technology needs within the Circuit Court Clerk's Office, including improving the e-filing and case management systems, data sharing and integration between criminal justice stakeholder agencies, making court schedule information available on the Clerk of the Circuit Court website and implementing automated court hearing reminders across all divisions. This update focuses on the need for a well-functioning case management system, which is critical to the entire Circuit Court system and is necessary to evaluate how efficiently and effectively the courts are operating. Beyond having the right system, it is critical that data are accurate and that system users are adequately trained.

In October 2020, the Cook County Chief Judge ordered the Clerk of the Cook County Circuit Court to halt implementation of the Circuit Court's new Odyssey case management system that is replacing the legacy system. The case management system in the Criminal Division, rolled out in November 2019, drew wide criticism from attorneys and judges for incomplete case information and delays in obtaining documentation.⁴ The Chief Judge ordered the Clerk to delay implementation of the Civil and Traffic Divisions of the case management system until receiving prior approval from the Court.⁵ The General Administrative Order cited concerns that the case management system "continues to be problematic" and that the Clerk had "chronic and significant difficulty adequately staffing and operating the legacy system."⁶

The Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court now says it is working with the presiding judges of the County Division and Criminal Division to address their concerns with features of the Odyssey case management system. The office is working toward going live with the five civil areas of law on a rolling basis rather than all at once, followed by the Traffic Division. The Clerk's Office hopes to have a fully robust system operational by the end of 2021. The contract with the Odyssey system vendor, Tyler Technologies, was extended through the end of the fiscal year (until November 30, 2021).

It remains unclear what the outstanding issues with the case management system are and what

4 Megan Crepeau, "Dorothy Brown's Office debuts upgrade to criminal court computers to wide ridicule," *Chicago Tribune*, November 28, 2019.

5 Matthew Hendrickson, "Court orders Dorothy Brown to halt planned updates to 'problematic' new case management system," *Chicago Sun Times*, October 23, 2020.

6 Circuit Court of Cook County General Administrative Order 2020-06, October 22, 2020.

steps need to be taken to address them. It does not appear that the Clerk has made an effort to interview court users other than judges. Feedback from the Clerk's employees, attorneys, litigants and other direct court users should be a critical component of evaluating how well the case management system is serving those who encounter the Circuit Court each day. The Clerk should also solicit feedback from the employees and members of the public that rely on the technology systems to obtain court record information. The Clerk should work with the system vendor to enable public remote access to the system, including full public access to scanned and e-filed documents.

7c. Implement Electronic Order Entry

New Directions recommended that the Clerk of the Circuit Court work with the Office of the Chief Judge to implement electronic drafting and entry of court orders and eliminate handwritten orders. After entry of an electronic order, that order should immediately be made available to the litigants, attorneys and the public via the online case management system.

This has been an ongoing problem with orders of protection at the Domestic Violence Division and in the branch courts. Petitioners are not receiving signed copies of emergency orders of protection (EOPs) the same day they are entered by the court. Neither are the orders consistently entered into the Law Enforcement Agencies Data System (LEADS) the same day. The Clerk's office continues to take the position that the dispersal of initial EOPs is the responsibility of the Chief Judge's staff, pursuant to the pandemic general order.

Advocates and petitioners continue to report unusual initial-filing delays for calendaring cases and scheduling return dates. Members of the Clerk's staff have met with representatives of the advocacy community with the goal of resolving the issues, and the community continues to monitor compliance.





PUBLIC ACCESS TO DATA

New Directions made the following recommendations to improve access to public data and information :

- Create a new Office of Data Management to improve internal data management and oversee external data requests;
- Work with the Illinois General Assembly to amend the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to make the Clerk’s Office subject to FOIA;⁷ and
- While awaiting a change to State law, voluntarily releasing data and information as if the office were subject to FOIA requirements.

This update focuses specifically on the status of FOIA oversight and steps for public transparency.

12. FOIA Transparency

A commitment to transparency was one of the key principles on which Clerk Martinez campaigned. In February 2020, ahead of the March 2020 primary election, then-State Senator Martinez introduced a bill into the 101st General Assembly that would have amended the Illinois FOIA statute to define the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County as a public body subject to FOIA.⁸ Specifically, it would have added the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County to the definition of “public body” and Section 2.5 of the FOIA statute⁹ related to records of public funds.

After taking office, Clerk Martinez worked with State Senator Michael Hastings to reintroduce the same bill in the 102nd General Assembly as Senate Bill 583.¹⁰ However, they have since weakened the bill by introducing Senate Committee Amendment 1, which removes all references to FOIA and instead adds the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County to Section 3a of the Local Records Act. This change would make reports and records of the obligation, receipt and use of public funds of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County open to public inspection.

The Clerk’s Office drafted Amendment 1 in response to opposition from the Illinois

7 The judicial branch is exempt from FOIA. Case law has held that Circuit Clerk offices, while separately elected, are part of the judicial branch and therefore not subject to FOIA as currently written.

8 Senate Bill 3850, 101st Illinois General Assembly.

9 5 ILCS 140, [Freedom of Information Act](#).

10 Senate Bill 583, 102nd Illinois General Assembly.

Clerks of Courts Association. Clerk Martinez said at an Illinois Senate Executive Committee hearing¹¹ that Amendment 1 clarifies through statute that information about public funds are available to the public. However, the same goal—and much more—would be accomplished by making the Clerk’s Office subject to FOIA. Senate Amendment 1 would not provide public access to information about case processing, statistical data gleaned from court records or general Clerk’s Office operations. Amendment 1 would also preclude requestors from obtaining copies of records (as opposed to inspecting records on premises), obtaining records in electronic form and appealing from a denial of a records request, all of which are provided in FOIA but not the Local Records Act. The Local Records Act contains no enforcement mechanisms.

Clerk Martinez’s reversal on a commitment to FOIA-level transparency is highly disappointing. As a result, our organizations are not able to support SB 583 as amended by Amendment 1.

13. Voluntarily Release Data

Apart from FOIA, the Clerk’s Office has historically provided certain statistical data on a voluntary basis (often at steep costs) to researchers, with the consent of the Office of the Chief Judge. However, as noted in *New Directions*, that process is often cumbersome and requests frequently go unfulfilled.

The difficulty with accessing certain Clerk’s Office data and information for purposes of research, evaluation and oversight has long been a challenge for the public, researchers and members of the media. Chicago Appleseed, Chicago Council of Lawyers and the Civic Federation had hoped to see the new Clerk work with the Cook County Chief Judge to improve the process for information requests through local policy. The new Clerk has made no plans to create an Office of Data Management. We hope to see the Clerk work with the Chief Judge to make the process for submitting information requests more transparent, standardized and accessible to all.

11 Illinois Senate Executive Committee Meeting, March 17, 2021.





ACCESSIBILITY AND USER SERVICES

New Directions recommended creating two high-level positions to oversee functions that have historically been left unfulfilled. The Chief Accessibility Officer and the Chief Public Service Officer would help with Circuit Court navigation and training of front-line staff. Unfortunately, the new Clerk of the Circuit Court has not initiated hiring for either of these positions.

14. Chief Accessibility Officer

A Chief Accessibility Officer would be responsible for coordinating initiatives to improve physical accommodations and accessibility for litigants with disabilities and improve language and translation services for court users with language needs.

The Clerk's Office says it has a Public Information team and is considering implementing a call center for ADA and language assistance. We urge the Clerk's administration go further in making meaningful improvements to accessibility.

15. Chief Public Service Officer

A Chief Public Service Officer would oversee access to justice and information for underserved and self-represented litigants. This position would ensure that all Clerk's Office personnel are adequately trained on e-filing and case management systems to address questions and assist self-represented litigants in navigating typical scenarios they face in court. The Chief Public Service Officer would additionally ensure uniformity and clarity of signage and court forms and conduct surveys to receive feedback from court users including judges, attorneys, jurors, and litigants. We hope to see the Clerk make genuine efforts toward fulfilling these needs going forward.

We hope to see the Clerk modernize her website, which is very difficult to navigate, to include each judge's daily court schedule, more easily accessible Zoom links for each courtroom, readily accessible court forms for self-represented litigants, information for non-English speakers and disabled court users, and other information that will assist members of the public with their court needs. Some of this information is currently on the website but is difficult to locate.



ETHICS AND OVERSIGHT

17. Shakman Oversight Compliance

The Clerk of the Circuit Court has been under federal court monitoring through the Shakman Consent Decree since 1972. The Consent Decree prohibits the Clerk's Office from making employment decisions based on political factors or coercing political contributions or activity from government employees in connection with their employment. In 2018, the Court appointed a Compliance Administrator to oversee the Clerk of the Circuit Court's hiring and employment practices and investigate unlawful political discrimination. The Clerk must reach substantial compliance with the Compliance Administrator's requirements in order to be released from court monitoring.

In the most recent report from January 2021,¹² the Shakman Compliance Administrator for the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County indicated that the new Clerk has cooperated in moving toward full compliance. Three recommendations were made by the Compliance Administrator in the January report:

1. The Clerk should be directed to provide Plaintiffs with an Amended Exempt List as soon as practicable.
2. An Amended Employment Plan should be finalized in the near term or by a date deemed appropriate by the Court.
3. The Clerk should be directed to provide notice of all employment actions immediately, and notice of all prior employment actions in the near term.

The Clerk's Office says Clerk Martinez has been focused on Shakman compliance since before taking office on December 1, 2021. At least two people with experience in Shakman litigation have been hired to executive staff positions—Chief of Staff and Chief of Human Resources. These staff members are working with the Compliance Administrator, the Plaintiffs' counsel, and the internal Director of Compliance to amend the Employment Plan and list of exempt positions, revise and update exempt job descriptions, develop various employment policies, and provide Shakman training to all employees. None of those lists, plans or policies have yet been finalized.

19. Inspector General Oversight

The *New Directions* report suggested that the Circuit Court Clerk work with the Cook County

12 Sixth Report of Susan G. Feibus as Compliance Administrator for the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, filed January 21, 2021, available at https://28deecac3-bfc7-4d05-9f05-d09ff9a915d3.filesusr.com/ugd/11c424_de646dded9a849bf9f21081ae8e72fef.pdf

Office of the Independent Inspector General (OIIG) to ensure stronger Inspector General oversight of the Clerk of the Court's Office in matters of fraud, waste, mismanagement or abuse. The Clerk's own Inspector General is a position that is hired internally, which we believe presents inherent conflict.

The Clerk's Office says it is reviewing opportunities to implement stronger Inspector General oversight. We encourage the Clerk to reach agreement with the County OIIG to provide oversight in order to restore public trust and oversight of the office.

20. Execute New Collective Bargaining Agreement

The collective bargaining agreement with the Teamsters Local 700, the union representing employees of the Clerk of the Cook County Circuit Court, expired on November 30, 2021. The Clerk's Office says it is in negotiations with the union for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement. We are not aware of the issues currently subject to negotiation or the timetable for completing these negotiations.





BUDGET TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The recommendations related to budget transparency and accountability in *New Directions* were to reassess staffing levels to ensure the best use of resources, conduct a review of special purpose funds, revise annual performance metrics to track operational efficiency and produce an annual report with budget, performance and statistical information about general court operations.

The latter three recommendations are longer term projects that we hope the Clerk of the Circuit Court will implement through her first year in office.

21. Ensure Best Usage of Resources

The first of these recommendations—reassessing staffing levels to ensure the best usage of resources—relies on an office-wide operational audit to be conducted so that use of current resources can be analyzed and re-evaluated. As discussed earlier in this report, the office-wide audit has not yet commenced. We hope this project will be initiated without further delay.



SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Our coalition—Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts, the Chicago Council of Lawyers, and the Civic Federation—is concerned that after more than three months in office, Clerk Martinez has not openly demonstrated a commitment to the urgently needed comprehensive reorientation of the office on which she campaigned and as recommended by the *New Directions* report. We recognize that the Clerk inherited an office with significant longtime structural and operational challenges, which will take time to remedy. However, we have not observed that the new Clerk’s administration is making an effort to: meet with interested civic or community groups; address accessibility and assistance to underserved court users; interview a variety of stakeholders about problems with current processes and technology systems; or make any real changes in deficient operations.

We remain hopeful that the Clerk will continue to work toward our recommendations and fulfill the campaign commitments she made to improve transparency and efficiency within the office. We further hope the Clerk of the Circuit Court will begin engaging regularly with the public, issuing regular announcements via press releases and press conferences, and voluntarily disclosing additional statistical data about case processing, court fines, fees and costs, vendor contracts, collective bargaining agreements and other topics of importance.