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**JUSTICE THOMAS R. FITZGERALD ELECTED AS NEXT SUPREME
COURT CHIEF JUSTICE**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill – The Supreme Court of Illinois announced Monday that it has unanimously elected Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald as its next Chief Justice, effective September 6, 2008.

Justice Fitzgerald, whose judicial career spans more than 30 years, was elected to the Supreme Court in 2000 from the First Judicial District (Cook County). While on the Court, he has been instrumental in several Supreme Court initiatives including the implementation of safeguards to improve the fair administration of justice in Illinois death penalty cases; putting more judicial focus on the best interests of children in custody, parental termination and adoption issues; and a call to train Illinois lawyers to help veterans receive free legal aid in obtaining their disability and educational benefits.

“I’m profoundly honored by my colleagues’ selection of me as Chief Justice,” said Justice Fitzgerald. “Fortunately, I will have their continued guidance to help me succeed.

“I have had the extraordinary pleasure of serving with four members of our Court who have served as Chief Justice: Robert Thomas, Mary Ann McMorrow, Moses Harrison and Charles Freeman. Each of them are dear and valued friends and will serve as my role models.”

Justice Fitzgerald will succeed Chief Justice Robert R. Thomas, whose term as Chief began September 6, 2005 and concludes at the end of September 5, 2008.

Justice Thomas’ tenure as Chief is marked by a lengthy list of Court achievements including the implementation of several new technologies for the courts; establishment of a Commission on Professionalism to promote principles of integrity, professionalism and civility among Illinois lawyers and judges; and a requirement for minimum continuing legal education for Illinois lawyers and judges.

“I am extremely proud of the progress made by the Court over the past three years, and I am certain that the Court will continue to make great strides under Justice Fitzgerald’s leadership,” said Chief Justice Thomas. “Tom is an outstanding jurist, a talented leader and, above all, a very dear friend.

“I look forward to calling him Chief.”

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Justice Fitzgerald, 66, is a native Chicagoan, and attended Loyola University before enlisting in the United States Navy. After his tour of duty in the Navy, he graduated with honors from The John Marshall Law School, where he was a founder of the school's current law review and served as the law review's associate editor.

The son of a Circuit Court judge, Justice Fitzgerald began his own career in the law as a prosecutor in the Cook County State's Attorneys office. When he was first elected to the Circuit Court bench in 1976, he was the youngest sitting judge in Cook County.

Justice Fitzgerald served as a trial judge in the Cook County Criminal Court from 1976 to 1987, when he was assigned Supervising Judge of Traffic Court. In 1989, he returned to the Criminal Division as Presiding Judge. He also was appointed to serve as presiding judge of Illinois' first statewide grand jury.

In April 1999 while still sitting as a Circuit Court judge, Justice Fitzgerald was appointed by the Supreme Court to be a member and chairperson of the Court's newly-formed Special Supreme Court Committee on Capital Cases to assess and improve the administration of justice in Illinois death penalty cases. Under Judge Fitzgerald's leadership, the Committee drafted new, innovative rules to improve the quality of justice in the trial of capital cases, including a requirement of Court certification to assure that only trained and experienced attorneys handle capital cases.

Justice Fitzgerald was elected to the Supreme Court in 2000, and the proposed rules were approved by the full Court shortly afterwards. He remains the Supreme Court liaison to the Special Committee.

Other achievements of Justice Fitzgerald while on the Court include a recommendation to his fellow justices that the Court find a way to improve the delivery of free legal services to veterans in obtaining disability and educational benefits. The Court assigned the task to its Commission on Professionalism; and in September 2007, Justice Fitzgerald joined Director L. Tammy Duckworth of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, officials of The John Marshall Law School, the Illinois State Bar Association and the Commission in announcing a broad initiative to help Illinois veterans obtain free legal services.

The immediate outgrowth has been a collaborative program to train Illinois lawyers to assist veterans on a pro bono basis, and the response from the legal community has been outstanding.

Justice Fitzgerald also recommended to his colleagues that the Court establish a Special Committee on Child Custody Issues. Along with his colleague, Justice Rita B. Garman, he served as liaison to the Committee which resulted in a new "900 Series" of Supreme Court rules to ensure that the best interests of children is the prime focus of all custody cases, and that all child custody proceedings be scheduled and heard on an expedited basis.

Justice Fitzgerald has been the recipient of numerous awards.

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They include the Outstanding Judicial Performance Award by the Chicago Crime Commission; Celtic Man of the Year by the Celtic Legal Society; the Herman Kogan Media Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism by the Chicago Bar Association.

The Lawyers' Assistance Program honored him in 2000 with the Hon. John Powers Crowley Award. He is the 2001 recipient of The John Marshall Law School Freedom Award. In 2003, Justice Fitzgerald was awarded the Joel Flaum Award by the Chicago Inn of Court, and the Chicago-Kent College of Law Professional Achievement Award. In 2005, Justice Fitzgerald was named Catholic Lawyer of the Year by the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago. He is a member of the Leo High School Hall of Fame.

Justice Fitzgerald has taught at The John Marshall Law School and Chicago-Kent College of Law, where he was assistant coordinator of the trial advocacy program from 1986 to 1996. He also has taught at the Einstein Institute for Science, Health and the Courts.

Justice Fitzgerald has served as president of the Illinois Judges Association, member of the Governor's Task Force on Crime and Corrections, chairman of several committees of the Illinois Judicial Conference, member of the Chicago Bar Association's Board of Managers and past chairman of the Chicago Bar Association's committees on constitutional law and long-range planning.

In a related order, the Supreme Court also named Justice Thomas L. Kilbride as a member of the Illinois Courts Commission to replace Justice Fitzgerald in that position when he becomes Chief Justice. The Illinois Courts Commission is a constitutionally established body which sits as a court in disciplinary cases involving judges.

With more than three months still remaining in his term as Chief, the Court under Justice Thomas' can count many achievements.

One of the major accomplishments during Justice Thomas' tenure as Chief was the establishment of a permanent structure, embodied as the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, to promote principles of integrity and civility among all Illinois lawyers and judges. One of the primary missions of the Commission, which is funded entirely by fees from lawyers and not taxpayer dollars, is to try to eliminate past patterns of divisiveness and bias in Illinois' legal system. One of its ancillary missions, recommended by Justice Fitzgerald, is to help train lawyers to help Illinois vets.

Going hand in hand with a goal of improved professionalism among attorneys is the implementation by the Court under Justice Thomas of new rules requiring continuing legal education for all practicing Illinois lawyers and judges. Each lawyer and judge is now required to take 30 hours of continuing legal education over every two-year period.

Under Chief Justice Thomas, the Court also has made big strides in the identification and implementation of information technologies that advance the services and functions of all the

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courts in the state while ensuring sound procedural and privacy protections. These changes will have a continuing impact on the courts, litigants and their attorneys in the years to come. The most visible improvements in electronic technology is the availability of the Court's oral arguments in video and audio format on the improved Court website. The arguments are posted on the website shortly after they are formally heard.

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**(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois
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