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October 21, 2008

## **ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS STANDARDS**

The Illinois Supreme Court announced Tuesday standards for emergency preparedness for all Illinois Circuit Courts to keep the courts open and operational and to safeguard court staff in the event of a catastrophe or disruption.

The official policy of the Supreme Court, embodied in the “Emergency Preparedness Standards for the Illinois Circuit Courts,” requires each Circuit to create and maintain an emergency plan in accordance with the standards. Each Circuit’s plan must be filed and approved with the Director of the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts by January 1, 2011, two years after the effective date of Tuesday’s order.

“The Supreme Court is committed to protecting the health and safety of judicial branch personnel and to keeping the courts open and operational in the event of a disruption or emergency,” said Cynthia Y. Cobbs, director of the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts which prepared the standards. “The standards provide realistic, basic requirements that must be met by all Circuits; and it is expected that these plans will address procedures for particular situations including evacuations, bomb threats, suspicious mail handling and weather disasters.”

The Chief Judge of each Circuit will be responsible for the development and maintenance of the Circuit’s Plan and annually file a copy of it with the Director of the Administrative Office. For circuits which are composed of multiple counties, the Circuit plan may include provisions specific to a single county to account for variances in local circumstances.

If a Circuit already has an established plan or is part of a multi-agency plan, it may be used to satisfy related requirements in the standards.

“The intent is not to limit circuits that choose to follow other models for structuring their emergency planning or that wish to include additional subject areas,” said Ms. Cobbs. “If it can be demonstrated that the requirements of the standards have been met, regardless of format, then the circuit has satisfied the mandate.”

The standards require each judicial Circuit to designate an Emergency Coordinating Officer (ECO) as well as additional personnel in each county within the circuit to assist the ECO.

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The Circuit emergency plans are to include a “Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), and should prioritize and identify essential court functions and the personnel required to perform them during an emergency. Among other requirements the Circuit plans must provide for alternate court facilities, should they become necessary; and the preservation of the integrity and confidentiality of electronic information; and the identification of alternate Information Technology facilities.

The Emergency Standards filed by the Court Tuesday run 13 pages, including a two-page introduction. They also include additional multiple pages of templates, appendices and instructions to simplify the process and encourage uniformity while still allowing for the diverse nature of Illinois counties and circuits. The Administrative Office will conduct training and informational sessions to aid the Circuits in preparing their plans.

The full document of the Emergency Preparedness Standards for the Illinois Circuit Courts is available on the Illinois Supreme Court website at <http://www.state.il.us/court/> under the tab of “Documents,” “policies/standards.”