



# Supreme Court of Illinois

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **OPEN HOUSE FOR RENOVATED PEORIA COUNTY LEGAL SELF-HELP CENTER/LAW LIBRARY TO BE HELD MARCH 20**

The Illinois Supreme Court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, established the Access to Justice Commission in June 2012 with the goal of removing barriers and increasing the ease of interacting with courts by persons who can't afford lawyers to represent their interests and needs.

As part of the Commission's continuing mission to provide access to justice, Chief Judge Michael Brandt of the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit has announced an open house for the newly renovated Peoria County Legal Self-Help Center/Law Library on Wednesday, March 20 from 10-11 a.m.

The public is welcome to tour the center and ask questions to court staff about its operations. The center is housed inside the courthouse, located at 324 Main Street in Peoria.

"I am pleased to see the Tenth Circuit continue its commitment in assisting citizens in gaining access to the court system," Chief Justice Kilbride said. "The recent renovation of the self-help center will increase the capacity and thus the opportunity for those who seek legal assistance to find it.

"Chief Judge Brandt and court staff are to be commended in this crucial mission of providing access to justice for all, regardless of means."

According to Chief Judge Brandt, the completed renovations mark a shift from the space's primary usage as a law library to a self-help center for litigants in civil cases who are unable to afford an attorney or need access to legal information as part of the Circuit's commitment in providing access to justice. The self-help center opened in 2008 as part of the law library that has been in existence since 1965. The center now will be staffed by a lawyer to provide help instead of a librarian.

"The new, renovated Peoria County Self-Help Center/Law Library demonstrates the commitment of the 10th Judicial Circuit Court to access to justice," Chief Judge Brandt said. "Even before the renovations, Peoria County's Self-Help Center was recognized at the Illinois Supreme Court's Conference on Access to Justice in October of 2012 as a Model I Center which is staffed with an attorney and in a separate space at our courthouse."

**MORE**

## **Open House for Renovated Legal Self-Help Center Add One**

The Access to Justice Commission held its first ever conference in October with the goal of exploring some of the fundamental issues relating to access to justice, and to begin developing an agenda to increase and enhance access to justice in Illinois. Jeffrey D. Colman, a partner at the Chicago firm of Jenner & Block, serves as the Commission's chair.

Renovations to the center/law library include replacing the carpets, repainting, as well as improving access to the first floor computer terminals, in addition to removing cumbersome bookshelves to open up space for better assistance for those using the computer terminals, especially those with disabilities. "I am very pleased to be a part of the creation of a renovated, more user-friendly Center that is much more accessible for persons with disabilities," Chief Judge Brandt said.

With the renovations, the self-help center will also provide a venue and opportunities for legal assistance organizations to provide valuable information to those who need it.

"I am also excited to have our Circuit partner with Prairie State Legal Services to start a Housing Court Outreach Project," Chief Judge Brandt said. "That project will involve legal aid or pro bono attorneys being available at the Courthouse adjacent to the Self-Help Center on days housing court (landlord/tenant) is held to assist low income, pro se litigants."

Joseph A. Dailing, who has served for nearly three decades as executive director of Prairie State Legal Services and recently as executive director of the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice, has overseen the planning and growth of nearly 100 legal self-help centers across Illinois, with Peoria County's self-help center being one of the first to open its doors to the public.

"The opening of the Peoria County Legal Self-Help Center in 2008 demonstrated the commitment of the court system to ensure that all litigants would have a chance to tell their story in a meaningful fashion to the judge," Mr. Dailing said. "Unfortunately, today, many litigants in civil cases cannot afford to hire an attorney to represent them and cannot find a legal aid or pro bono attorney to help them.

"Judges, the circuit clerk and the law librarian are all to be congratulated not only for this new facility but for their continuing collaboration with the Peoria County Bar Association, Prairie State Legal Services and the public libraries in Peoria County to make these resources widely available but also for developing creative programs to continue to improve access to justice for lower income residents.

"The court system of the Tenth Judicial Circuit continues to be a statewide leader in ensuring meaningful access to the court system."

The center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, director of communications to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.2323 or Chief Judge Michael Brandt of the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit at 309.672.6047)**