



# Supreme Court of Illinois

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## **SUPREME COURT'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION NAMES DANIELLE HIRSCH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Under the leadership of Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, the Illinois Supreme Court established the Access to Justice Commission in June 2012 and has been working on ways to remove barriers and increase the ease of interacting with courts by persons who can't afford lawyers to represent their interests and needs.

This week, the Commission has taken another big step by bringing on board Danielle E. Hirsch as its executive director.

Since its inception, the Commission has been working to address the goals set by the Court, holding its first conference in October to gather input from all walks of the legal profession. As a result, several committees have been formed to address access-to-justice challenges head on and to promote ideas on how to remove barriers.

As an example, one of the five committees formed by the Commission has been charged with creating and standardizing certain legal forms to make it easier for people to understand and complete, and more efficient for courts to review. These include proposed forms in areas including divorce, name change, expunging and sealing of criminal records, orders of protection and certain procedural forms. Once approved, the forms will be made available on the Supreme Court's website.

Other committees of the Commission were created to enhance access to justice in other ways, including developing recommendations for addressing language barriers inside and outside the courtroom, court buildings and during court hearings; providing guidance to court officers and non-lawyers on how to assist pro se litigants without crossing the line in giving formal legal advice; involving deans in law schools across Illinois to collaborate on what the system and their individual schools can do to promote access to justice; and streamlining the process so retired lawyers are able to engage in pro bono work more easily.

Ms. Hirsch, an Illinois attorney, brings a broad range of professional experience to the Commission, including serving as Director of Advocacy for the Chicago Bar Foundation (CBF) for the past four years.

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## **New Executive Director – Access to Justice Commission Add One**

"Our Court is pleased that Ms. Hirsch will serve as the first executive director of the Access to Justice Commission," said Chief Justice Kilbride, who presented the proposal for creating the Access to Justice Commission to his colleagues on the Court. "She brings energy, enthusiasm, and a keen intellect and insight into access to justice issues. Her proven leadership in helping citizens is an invaluable asset."

At the CBF, Ms. Hirsch was responsible for the oversight and management of the CBF's legislative and court-based policy advocacy activities. She also developed and managed an innovative program called "Illinois JusticeCorps" that places college and law students in select courthouses to provide procedural assistance to people without legal representation. In 2012, the program was awarded a competitive AmeriCorps grant to expand the program into courthouses in Bloomington, Chicago and Markham. Ms. Hirsch will continue to direct the program as part of her work with the Commission.

Ms. Hirsch has also worked as an adjunct professor at The John Marshall Law School since 2009. She co-teaches a human rights class comparing the constitutional jurisprudence of the United States and South Africa, a country where she also has worked.

Ms. Hirsch begins her new position April 1.

Jeffrey D. Colman, a partner at the Chicago firm of Jenner & Block and chair of the Commission, said Ms. Hirsch will bring a proven track record to her new position.

"The Access to Justice Commission has been working extraordinarily hard for the past nine months to propose steps to increase access to justice for the poor and vulnerable in our communities," Mr. Colman said. "Danielle has a solid record of commitment in working to increase access to justice. She will be an outstanding executive director and will help tremendously in our ongoing improvement in access to justice.

"We are delighted to have her on board."

The Commission is comprised of 11 persons, seven of whom are appointed by the Supreme Court. The Illinois Bar Foundation, the Chicago Bar Foundation, the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois and the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation appoint one member each.

The Commission is designed to complement and collaborate with other entities in Illinois already addressing access to justice issues.

"I am greatly honored that the Commissioners and the Illinois Supreme Court have placed their confidence in me for this role," Ms. Hirsch said. "Equal access to justice is a fundamental principle of our democracy, integral to the effective functioning of our courts and a critical part of the safety net for those in need.

"I am looking forward to working with the Commissioners, our many hard-working Commission committees and subcommittees and dedicated volunteer staff to ensure our justice system is more efficient, effective, fair and accessible for everyone."

**MORE**

**New Executive Director – Access to Justice Commission  
Add Two**

Prior to her work at the CBF, Ms. Hirsch clerked for the Hon. William Wayne Justice of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas and Justice ZM Yacoob of the Constitutional Court of South Africa. She was an associate with the K&L Gates law firm in Pittsburgh, Penn. for several years.

Ms. Hirsch graduated from Oberlin College (Ohio) with a B.A. degree in Politics and East Asian Studies. She received her juris doctor degree, *summa cum laude*, from the University of Illinois College of Law in 2004 and was elected to the Order of the Coif. She was named the Rickert Award Winner for excellence in academic achievement and also named the winner of the National Association of Women Lawyers Outstanding Woman Law Graduate for 2004.

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, will volunteer his services as staff support; and the Chicago Bar Foundation also will lend a member of its staff on a part-time basis.

The Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts will provide in-kind support for supplies, mailings and meeting space as well as other administrative support.

Similar commissions have been established in 26 other states as well as Washington, D.C. Its creation in Illinois has been endorsed by the Illinois State Bar Association, the Chicago Bar Association and the Illinois Judges Association.

In addition to Mr. Colman, other members of the Commission are: Illinois Appellate Court Justice Mary K. Rochford, First Judicial District, Chicago; Chief Judge Michael J. Sullivan, 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit, Woodstock; Circuit Judge Daniel J. Pierce, Cook County Circuit Court; Circuit Judge Debra B. Walker, Cook County Circuit Court; Associate Judge Leonard Murray, Cook County Circuit Court; Kelly Cheesman, Knox County Circuit Court Clerk, Galesburg; Michael A. Fiello, managing attorney, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, Inc., Carbondale; Timothy W. Kelly, founder and partner, Kelly Law Offices, Bloomington; Jennifer T. Nijman, partner, Nijman Franzetti LLP, Chicago; and Michael A. Pope, partner, McDermott Will and Emery, Chicago.

Commission members serve as volunteers and no taxpayer money is used to fund the salary of the commission's executive director.