



# Supreme Court of Illinois

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## **SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES NEW CIVIL JUSTICE DIVISION**

The Illinois Supreme Court has announced the creation of a Civil Justice Division within the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC), charged with supporting the Court's multi-dimensional initiatives to improve access to justice throughout the state. In addition, Chief Justice Rita B. Garman has named Timothy W. Kelly of Bloomington, IL, as the next chairman of the Access to Justice Commission.

In 2012, the Court established an Access to Justice Commission to "promote, facilitate, and enhance equal access to justice with an emphasis on access to the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable." The Commission, made up of dedicated volunteers, has made great strides in improving access for non-native English speakers and in standardizing various forms and procedures, making them more user-friendly for pro se litigants. The creation of the new Civil Justice Division will formalize the role of the Commission within the Court's administrative structure. By bringing this function under the administrative umbrella of the AOIC, and creating a sixth operational division, the Court has ensured that this function will be fully supported by all of the facilities and resources available to other agencies and programs of the Supreme Court.

"The Civil Justice Division, now with a permanent home within our Administrative Office, will support the Court's effort to improve access to justice throughout the state of Illinois," said Chief Justice Garman. "Going forward, the access to justice initiative will be more fully integrated into the Court's larger efforts and will benefit from the expertise and resources available within the administrative structure of the court system."

Under the Illinois Constitution, the Supreme Court has supervisory authority over the State's judiciary and the legal profession. The Constitution also authorizes the Supreme Court to appoint an Administrative Director and staff to assist the Chief Justice in fulfilling these administrative and supervisory duties.

**MORE**

## **Supreme Court Announces New Civil Justice Division Add One**

Michael J. Tardy, Director of the AOIC, offered that the creation of the Civil Justice Division within the AOIC will greatly enhance and support the Supreme Court's objective of increasing access to justice. "The Administrative Office's capacity to implement the Supreme Court's initiatives to increase access to civil justice will be strengthened through this structure," Mr. Tardy said. "The new Civil Justice Division within the AOIC will propose, implement, measure, and refine policies and procedures designed to, among other things, improve access to civil justice."

Danielle E. Hirsch, who previously served as executive director of the Access to Justice Commission, is now assistant director of the Civil Justice Division and will serve as the AOIC's chief liaison with the Commission.

The Commission is made up of eleven volunteer members who serve three-year terms. Seven members 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 each appoint one member. The chair is appointed by the Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court.

Since its inception, the Commission has been chaired by Jeffrey D. Colman, a partner in the Chicago law firm of Jenner & Block. In the two years since the Commission began its work under his leadership, the Supreme Court has adopted several measures in response to Commission recommendations, including: amending the Judicial Canon of Ethics to permit judges to make reasonable efforts to facilitate the ability of self-represented litigants to be fairly heard; creating a model language access plan to enhance the integrity of judicial proceedings where one or more participants is a non-English speaker; easing attorney licensing requirements for lawyers who are spouses or civil union partners of active military personnel serving in Illinois; and expanding the rule allowing law students to represent indigent clients under the supervision of licensed attorneys. Each of these innovations improves access to justice by increasing the availability of legal services or by facilitating self-representation.

The Commission has also undertaken an initiative to design and implement simplified standard forms for use in various legal proceedings. One such form is intended for use in simple, uncontested name change proceedings. Once approved, the forms will be available in either electronic or paper format and will be accepted in all judicial circuits throughout the state. In the future, proposed drafts of other such standardized forms will be posted for public comment.

Chief Justice Garman has appointed Mr. Kelly of Bloomington to serve as the chair of the Access to Justice Commission. He was one of the eleven initial appointees to the Commission in 2012 and was reappointed to a three-year term in 2013. As such, he has been involved in the work of the Commission since its inauguration.

"Mr. Kelly is an experienced litigator who, before he entered private practice, worked as a legal aid attorney and as an assistant public defender", said Chief Justice Garman. "As such, he is familiar with the barriers faced by unrepresented litigants, non-English speaking parties, veterans, and others who are often underserved by the legal system. I am confident that he will provide outstanding leadership."

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Add Two**

The Chief Justice thanked Mr. Colman for his dedication to the cause of access to civil justice and commended him for his tireless efforts.

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**(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, director of communications to  
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