

2012 REPORT

Annual Report to the General Assembly on 2012 Judicial Conference

On October 25, 2012, the Illinois Judicial Conference convened its annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois. Article 6, section 17, of the Illinois Constitution mandates the Conference to consider the work of the courts and to suggest improvements in the administration of justice. Illinois Supreme Court Rule 41 implements this constitutional mandate by defining the duties and the membership of the Illinois Judicial Conference. Consistent with Rule 41, the Conference is composed of judges from every level of the judiciary and represents Illinois' five judicial districts. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois presides over the Conference, and the other Justices serve as members.

Eight appointed committees largely perform the work of the Judicial Conference throughout the year. These committees are the Alternative Dispute Resolution Coordinating Committee, Automation and Technology Committee, Study Committee on Complex Litigation, Committee on Criminal Law and Probation Administration, Committee on Discovery Procedures, Committee on Education, Study Committee on Juvenile Justice, and the recently added Committee on Strategic Planning. The committees' rosters include appellate, circuit, and associate judges who serve as members of the Judicial Conference. Their work is aided by judges, law professors, and attorneys appointed by the Supreme Court as either associate members or advisors to the committees. Senior level staff of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts serve as liaisons to support the committees' activities.

As authorized in Supreme Court Rule 41, the Executive Committee acts on behalf of the Conference when it is not in session. The Executive Committee consists of fourteen judges, with six from the First Judicial District (Cook County) and two from each of judicial districts two, three, four and five. The Executive Committee previews the written reports of the Conference committees and submits an annual meeting agenda for the Supreme Court's approval.

The 2012 Annual Meeting of the Judicial Conference lasted only one day, minimizing the judges' time away from the bench and managing costs more effectively. Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride convened the meeting. In his opening remarks, Chief Justice Kilbride welcomed those in attendance and thanked them for their hard work during the Conference year. He also recognized the current members of the Supreme Court, as well as the retired Supreme Court Justices in attendance. Concluding his introductions, Chief Justice Kilbride recognized Michael J. Tardy, Director of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, and thanked the Director and his staff for their work in preparing for the Annual Meeting of the Conference.

Chief Justice Kilbride remarked that, even without a constitutional mandate, a similar gathering would arise due to Illinois judges' shared commitment to improving the administration of justice. Reflecting on the role of the courts, the Chief Justice challenged the Conference members to work toward the common goal of providing the state's citizens a fair and efficient judicial system. Chief Justice Kilbride also noted that good ideas do not exist only at the top of an organization but arise at all levels. With that premise in mind, Chief Justice Kilbride encouraged the judges, clerks, probation departments, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, and all individuals of the court system to foster a culture that promotes the development of good ideas from all sources.

Chief Justice Kilbride announced that the Supreme Court issued new statewide standards and new and amended Supreme Court rules to allow all Illinois circuit courts to begin electronically filing court documents in civil cases. Concurrently, the new statewide e-filing principles and standards protect against identity theft and the disclosure of sensitive information. Chief Justice Kilbride commented that uniform standards allow all circuit courts to benefit from e-filing's greater efficiencies and long-range cost savings as well as provide a modern way of doing business. Chief Justice Kilbride expressed his hope that the

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Illinois judiciary would begin to implement e-business practices as quickly and efficiently as possible, stating that "the door is open for any circuit in any county around the state to implement e-filing" as long as the chief judge and circuit clerk agree they are ready.

Chief Justice Kilbride reminded the attendees that the Judicial Conference's purpose "to consider the work of the courts and to suggest improvements in the administration of justice" creates a framework for self-evaluation. As a forum for its members, the Conference offers an opportunity to examine existing judicial practices carefully and to recommend adjustments and improvements to the court system. The Conference should report on the current state of the judicial branch as well as outline plans for furthering an efficient and adaptive state judiciary. Committee charges and work should be open to all ideas that advance judicial principles and adapt the judiciary to meet changing demands.

In 2012, Chief Justice Kilbride also changed the format of the Conference's Annual Meeting. A nationally renowned court consultant guided a new strategic planning process. Conference members were assigned to specific groups for comprehensive strategic planning about automation and technology, access to justice, case management and court performance, court funding and use of public resources, organizational structure and systems governance, civil justice, criminal justice, juvenile justice, and judicial education, performance, and conduct. On behalf of the Illinois Supreme Court, Chief Justice Kilbride asked Conference members to partner with them to develop a plan for the future of Illinois' justice system. In closing, Chief Justice Kilbride encouraged Conference members to continue to reflect on ways to enhance Illinois' courts because their work is the foundation for improving our justice system.

After the Chief Justice concluded his remarks, Conference committees met during the morning session to finalize committee reports and to initiate planning for Conference Year 2013. The morning plenary session included a presentation of each committee's activities in Conference Year 2012