



ILLINOIS JUDICIAL BRANCH

STRATEGIC AGENDA

2019-2022



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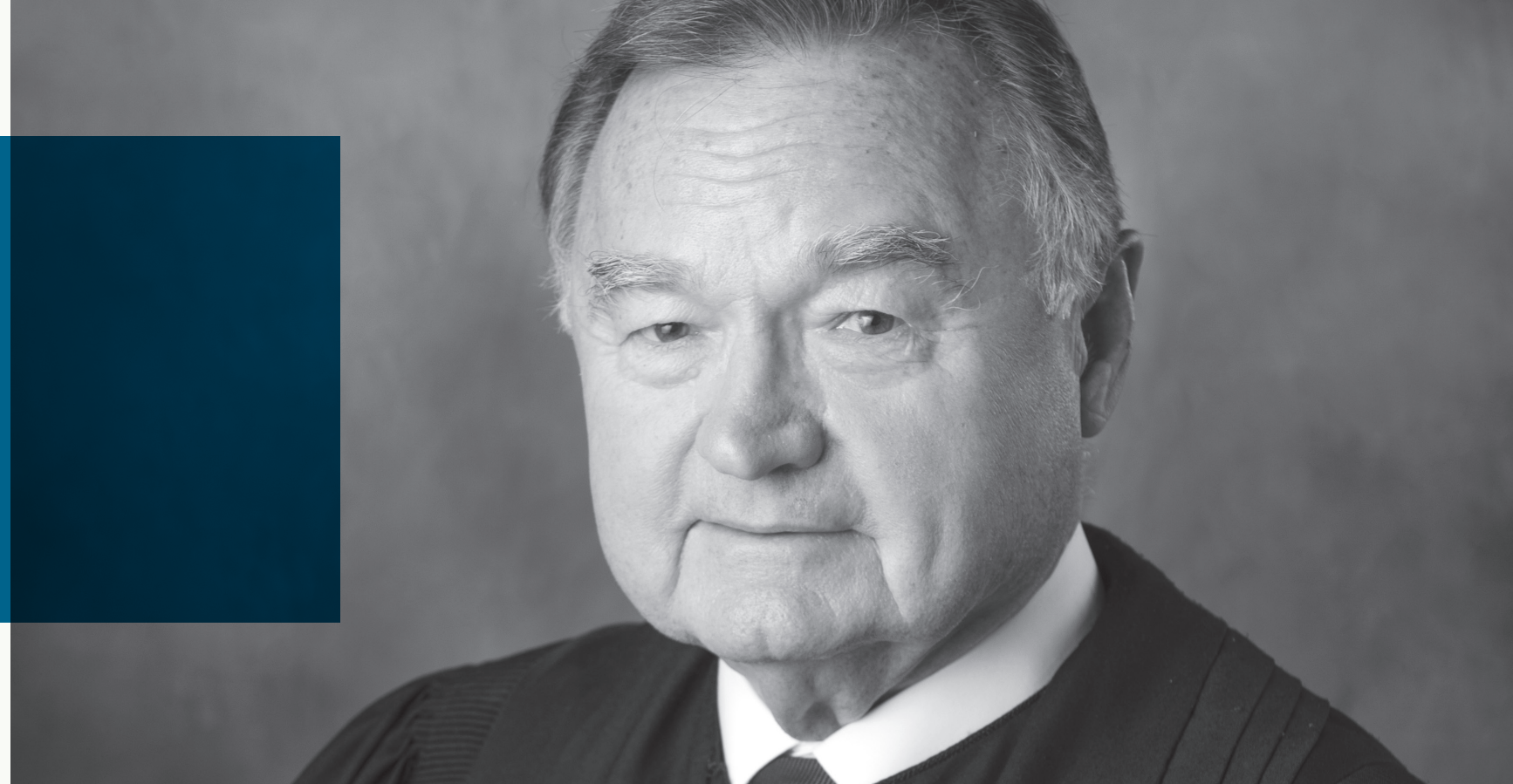
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FROM CHIEF JUSTICE

LLOYD A. KARMEIER



As the Judicial Branch of the State of Illinois enters its third century of service, it does so in an environment markedly different from the one faced by Justice John Reynolds in the spring of 1819, when he convened the first session of court under our authority in the small Washington County community of Covington. We truly were the “prairie state” in those days, a large expanse of largely unsettled land along the Mississippi River. Our population numbered fewer than 60,000 people, mostly concentrated in the southern third of the state. Chicago’s incorporation as a town was still nearly a decade and a half away.

Today Illinois stands as one of this country’s most populous and diverse states, with a gross domestic product exceeding that of Saudi Arabia. While approximately 75% of our total land area is still devoted to farming, Chicago has grown to become the third largest city in the United States, and Illinois has been transformed into a major center for industry, commerce and technological innovation.

Unfortunately, however, we also find ourselves in a world where governmental resources have become more scarce just as public health, welfare and safety concerns have continued to mount. Illinois currently has more people in prison and jail than we had residents at the time of our admission to the Union. We have not escaped the opioid epidemic. Growing economic disparities threaten the stability of many of our communities and have placed meaningful access to the court system beyond the reach of a growing number of poor and middle-class families. To make matters worse, changing political norms have eroded public confidence in the ability of governmental institutions, including the courts, to carry out their basic responsibilities under the law.

If the courts are to continue to make good on the promise of equal justice under law in this new and challenging environment, we must be proactive. Waiting for problems to develop and then responding will no longer do. Rather, it is critical that we anticipate the difficulties ahead and prepare for them in a reasoned and coordinated way, drawing on the insights and experience of every part, every level and every region of the Judicial Branch. It is with this purpose and in this spirit that our court decided last year to fundamentally restructure the Illinois Judicial Conference and assign it a new and specific responsibility: formulating a strategic plan to guide the future of the Judicial Branch.

The document that follows represents the Judicial Conference’s inaugural effort to carry out that responsibility. In it, you will find the principles that will guide us over the next three years as we undertake the duties conferred on the Judicial Branch by the People of the State of Illinois. On behalf of the entire Supreme Court, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of the Judicial Conference, the staff of the Administrative Office, and the many other individuals who have worked so tirelessly over the past year to bring this project to fruition. Through your efforts, you have helped insure that as Illinois moves into the future, no one will be left outside justice’s gates.

– Chief Justice Lloyd A. Karmeier
Chair, Illinois Judicial Conference

ILLINOIS JUDICIAL CONFERENCE - PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC AGENDA
FOR THE ILLINOIS JUDICIAL BRANCH

In October of 2018, the Illinois Supreme Court amended Supreme Court Rule 41 to reconstitute the Illinois Judicial Conference. The amended rule provides that “[t]here shall be a Judicial Conference to consider the work of the courts and to suggest improvements in the administration of justice. The Judicial Conference shall be the body to strategically plan for the Illinois judicial branch.”

The restructured Judicial Conference is comprised of 29 members—15 judges and 14 non-judges. The Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court is the chairperson. The judicial members include a second member of the Supreme Court, as well as judges from all levels and geographic areas of the state appointed either by nature of their position or individually selected by the Supreme Court. The Judicial Conference non-judicial members include the Director of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and 13 other justice partners selected by the Court from the following categories: court clerks, court administrators, attorneys, and public members. On the final page of the Strategic Agenda you can view the initial roster of the reconstituted Judicial Conference who worked to develop this Strategic Agenda.

The Judicial Conference met in person four times during the last year, including two multi-day sessions. The strategic planning process included drafting and administering a survey gathering feedback

and suggestions from judicial officers, Judicial Branch employees, justice partners, and external stakeholders to help shape the future direction, goals, and strategic priorities of the Judicial Branch. In addition to the survey, the Judicial Conference reviewed internal and external trends affecting the Judicial Branch and assessed future implications of those trends. The Judicial Conference also engaged in an organizational assessment analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the Judicial Branch.

After careful thought and much deliberation, the Judicial Conference crafted mission and vision statements and a set of core values for the Judicial Branch. The Judicial Conference identified five Strategic Goals to be addressed in the three-year Strategic Agenda together with strategies designed to achieve each of these Strategic Goals.

The reconstituted Illinois Judicial Conference has made for a more diverse and inclusive planning body for shaping the future of the Judicial Branch. Implementation of strategies to achieve each Strategic Goal will allow judicial officers, court personnel, and justice partners to come together to think beyond day to day problems, allocate and use limited resources, and sustain internal and external cooperation and collaboration to improve the delivery of justice and better serve the public.

MISSION

To protect the rights and liberties of all by providing equal access to justice, resolving disputes, and upholding the rule of law pursuant to the powers and duties entrusted to us by the Illinois Constitution.

VISION

To be trusted and open to all by being fair, innovative, diverse, and responsive to changing needs.





CORE VALUES

FAIRNESS – impartial in our actions, decisions, and treatment of all.

ACCOUNTABILITY – responsible and answerable for our conduct and performance, and transparent in the use of public resources.

INTEGRITY – honest, trustworthy, and committed to the highest ethical and professional standards.

RESPECT – treat all with dignity, courtesy, and understanding.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1

ACCESSIBLE JUSTICE & EQUAL PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW

The Illinois Judicial Branch is committed to ensuring accessible justice and equal protection under the law through programs and services that meet current and changing needs. The Branch will achieve these goals through the following strategies.

- 1.** Improve and expand services and resources to assist self-represented litigants and non-English speaking court users.
- 2.** Advocate for and promote free and affordable representation for low and middle-income parties as well as encourage the expansion of pro bono services.
- 3.** Promote and enhance remote access to court services, court and case information, and court appearances.
- 4.** Collaborate with providers and community partners in advocating for needed community-based services.
- 5.** Enhance, expand, and implement evidence-based practices and effective problem-solving approaches and programs.
- 6.** Advocate for and pursue responsible justice system reforms.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2

PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS, TIMELINESS, & OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Improving fairness, resolving disputes and legal matters in a timely and efficient manner, and enhancing the efficiency of court operations are priorities for the Illinois Judicial Branch. The Branch will achieve these goals through the following strategies.

1. Establish and implement effective case management standards and practices for the timely resolution of cases.
2. Develop standardized data collection, analysis, and reporting in all courts in the State.
3. Use court performance data and technology to measure and enhance timeliness and operational efficiencies.
4. Simplify and streamline court processes.
5. Promote and implement procedural fairness principles and best practices.
6. Encourage and expand the use of non-adversarial problem-solving methods in civil and criminal cases.
7. Collaborate with justice system partners to improve court operations and efficiency.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3**PROFESSIONALISM
& ACCOUNTABILITY
THROUGHOUT THE
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

The Illinois Judicial Branch and the people we serve across our state expect professionalism and individual accountability of judicial officers and court personnel. The Branch will achieve these goals through the following strategies.

- 1.** Establish and require adherence to the highest ethical standards for professional conduct.
- 2.** Promote accountability and high performance in judicial officers and court personnel.
- 3.** Build and nurture a court and Judicial Branch culture that embraces fairness and is free from bias.
- 4.** Recognize and embrace the value of diversity and inclusion.
- 5.** Enhance the knowledge, skills, and temperament of judicial officers and court personnel.
- 6.** Seek and retain a talented and dedicated workforce.
- 7.** Develop future Judicial Branch leaders.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4

UNDERSTANDING OF & CONFIDENCE IN THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

Increasing understanding of, and building confidence in, the Illinois Judicial Branch are vitally important. The Branch will use the following strategies to achieve these goals.

- 1.** Provide information to the public, other state and local branches of government, justice partners, and court personnel using multiple methods of communication.
- 2.** Educate the public, other branches of state and local government, justice partners, and court personnel about the purpose, needs, priorities, initiatives, and innovations of the Judicial Branch.
- 3.** Solicit feedback from the public, communities, justice partners, stakeholders, and court personnel to enhance the Judicial Branch's understanding of issues, expectations, and changing needs.
- 4.** Strengthen relations with local communities, including religious and civic organizations, social service providers, law enforcement, media, and schools.

STRATEGIC GOAL 5

SUFFICIENT FUNDING & EFFECTIVE USE OF JUDICIAL BRANCH RESOURCES



The Illinois Judicial Branch is committed to maintaining sufficient funding and using Judicial Branch resources (e.g., fiscal, judicial officers, court personnel, technology, etc.) responsibly and effectively. The Branch will achieve these goals through the following strategies.

- 1.** Evaluate state and local court funding and assess how resources are allocated.
- 2.** Budget and use resources in a responsible, accountable, transparent, and cost-effective manner.
- 3.** Fairly distribute resources among courts across the state to ensure core functions are supported.
- 4.** Demonstrate the need for sufficient state and local court funding.
- 5.** Inform and educate others about state and local court funding, costs, and resource needs.
- 6.** Collaborate with justice partners and stakeholders to ensure sufficient state and local court funding and resources.
- 7.** Seek alternative funding and resources when available and aligned with priorities.

ILLINOIS JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

The following Conference and support team members worked to develop this Strategic Agenda:

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Special Thanks to Supreme Court **Justice Mary Jane
Theis** for her participation and invaluable input.

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