

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT:

Recommendations for Planning and Transitioning to New Leadership

Executive Summary

Chicago Appleseed, Chicago Council of Lawyers and the Civic Federation have released a transition report with the following recommendations for the next Clerk of the Circuit Court to better serve the public and users of the court system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL MANAGEMENT

1. Conduct a Complete Office Audit to Identify Areas for Savings, Efficiency Improvements, and Resource Repurposing
2. Establish a Clear Mission Statement
3. Establish an Emergency Remote Operation Plan

TECHNOLOGY

4. Work with Judges to Improve Remote Hearing Capability
5. Create a Functional Case Management System
6. Improve Integration of Data Between the Circuit Court and Other Criminal Justice Stakeholders
7. Improve E-Filing System
 - A. Simplify User Interface and Streamline User Experience Across Divisions
 - B. Allow "Kiosk Mode" Filing and Alternatives to E-mail for Self-Represented Users
 - C. Implement Electronic Order Entry and End the Use of Carbon Paper
 - D. Preapprove Filings by Most Law Firms
 - E. Conduct a User Survey
8. Make Judges' Daily Court Calls Available Online
9. Install a Court Recording System in Every Courtroom
10. Implement Court Hearing Reminders for All Litigants

PUBLIC ACCESS TO DATA

11. Create a New Office of Data Management to Improve Internal Data Management and Oversee External Data Requests
12. Work with the Illinois General Assembly to Amend State Statute to Make Information in the Clerk of the Circuit Court's Possession Subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act
13. While Working Toward a Change in State Law, Voluntarily Release Data and Operations Information

ACCESSIBILITY AND USER SERVICES

14. Appoint a Chief Accessibility Officer
 - A. Improve ADA and Language Access
15. Appoint a Chief Public Service Officer
 - A. Improve Access to Justice
16. Improve Partnerships with Other Agencies

ETHICS AND OVERSIGHT

17. Continue to Comply with Shakman Consent Decree Requirements
18. Eliminate Patronage Hiring in the Office of the Circuit Court Clerk
19. Ensure Stronger Inspector General Oversight
20. Execute a New Collective Bargaining Agreement

BUDGET TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

21. Reassess Staffing Levels to Ensure the Best Use of Resources
22. Conduct Comprehensive Review of Special Purpose Funds
23. Revise Annual Performance Metrics
24. Produce an Annual Report with Budget, Performance, and Statistical Information

The full report can be found at chicagoappleseed.org/2020-clerk-transition-report and civicroad.org/CircuitCourtClerk2020.

TIMELINE

FIRST 30 DAYS:

- Initiate an office-wide audit, including a desk audit to review staffing levels, office functions, and needed efficiencies.
- Draft an updated mission statement.
- Initiate plans to create the following new positions:
 - FOIA Officer
 - Chief Accessibility Officer
 - Chief Public Service Officer
- Establish an emergency and remote operations plan for the Clerk's employees to ensure continuity in the event of further COVID-19-related or other emergency courthouse closures.

FIRST 180 DAYS:

- Undertake a comprehensive review of technology systems, including the Clerk's website, e-filing system, and case management system.
- Undertake a comprehensive financial audit and review of Special Purpose Funds.
- Review and revise performance metrics for the office.
- Create an Office of Data Management to ensure transparency and availability of data concerning court performance, Clerk's Office operations, and financial management.
- Comply with Shakman conditions to achieve substantial compliance with Consent Decree requirements and eliminate patronage-based employment decisions.
- Finalize negotiation of a new collective bargaining agreement for office staff.
- Assist the courts in enhancing their capacity to hold remote court hearings.
- Establish stronger Inspector General oversight by referring all complaints to the Cook County Independent Inspector General.

FIRST YEAR:

- Release a comprehensive, data-rich Annual Report regarding Clerk's Office operations and collection and disbursement of funds.
- Support and assist in installing a court recording system in every courtroom in Cook County and provide public access to digital recordings.
- Reorganize the office, its priorities, and its staffing levels in various divisions as recommended by the office-wide audit.
- Advocate for a change in Illinois Statute to make the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County subject to FOIA.