

- **Recognizing the Importance of Illinois Circuit Court Clerks**

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Last week, I had the honor of speaking at the Spring Meeting of the Illinois Association of Court Clerks in Springfield. While circuit clerks may not be the most visible or familiar public servant in the courthouse, their role is indispensable.

In addition to the constitutional and statutory role as official keeper of the court record, circuit clerks and their staff are often the first interaction that filers, litigants, witnesses and other court users have at their local courthouse. I have heard this referred to as the “counter encounter” – and a positive exchange there can set the tone for an individual’s entire experience with the court system. In this way, circuit clerks also serve as major ambassadors of our judicial system.

And of these constitutional officers, much is asked.

Circuit clerks are elected officials serving four-year terms. Their duties are defined by state statutes, including the Clerks of Courts Act (705 ILCS 105), as well as Illinois Supreme Court rules, administrative orders, local court rules, and county ordinances. Although our 102 circuit clerks are elected at the county level, circuit clerks are state judicial branch officers. Their primary responsibility is to attend court proceedings and maintain a complete, accurate, and permanent record of all court activities, including filings, orders, judgments, evidence, and case outcomes across 28 case types – ranging from criminal and civil matters to traffic, family, and juvenile cases.

Beyond recordkeeping, the Circuit Clerk’s Office plays a central role in managing the flow of cases through the court system. This includes assigning case numbers, scheduling hearings, maintaining court dockets, tracking case progress, and processing appeals. Careful adherence to these responsibilities ensures that cases move efficiently and that due process is upheld.

Circuit clerks also serve as a critical data and reporting hub for the State of Illinois, providing court records, statistics, and outcomes to agencies such as the Secretary of State, State Police, Department of Corrections, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, and the State Disbursement Unit. As such, their work supports statewide implementation of critical policies involving public safety and child support payments, among many other things.

Financial management is another major function of the office. Circuit clerks are responsible for the collection, accounting, and disbursement of court-related funds, including filing fees, fines,

and payments tied to court orders. Across Illinois, this represents hundreds of millions of dollars annually, underscoring the office's significant fiduciary responsibility and the need for accuracy and accountability.

In addition, the clerk's office issues and maintains official court documents, such as summons, subpoenas, warrants, and judgments, giving legal effect to the actions of the court. Clerks also provide public access to court records and services, offering both in-person and online tools that allow individuals, attorneys, and agencies to search case information, make payments, and interact with the court system.

The Circuit Clerk's Office further provides direct administrative support to judges and court staff, including courtroom preparation, docket management, and implementation of technology systems that improve efficiency and access to justice.

Beyond their statutory duties, circuit clerks are active contributors to the broader judicial system, serving on Illinois Supreme Court committees and commissions, participating in statewide initiatives such as access to justice and technology improvements, assisting with judicial education through the Illinois Judicial College, and engaging in legislative and policy development.

Illinois circuit court clerks are essential to the functioning of the judicial system. They ensure the integrity of the court record, the smooth progression of cases, the proper handling of public funds, and meaningful access to justice. Their work connects courtrooms across all 102 counties into a unified, accountable, and transparent statewide judicial system.

On behalf of the AOIC, I express my gratitude to the Illinois circuit clerks for their collective commitment to education, collaboration and transparency the many ways they help to keep the justice system trains running.