

Court Information Release



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Chief Judge Pallmeyer delivers annual “State of the Court” Address

CHICAGO, Ill. – On June 14, 2023, Chief Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer delivered the 2023 Annual State of the Court Address at a luncheon sponsored by the Chicago Chapter of the Federal Bar Association.

In her remarks, Judge Pallmeyer highlighted the court’s easing of COVID-19 measures. As of April 1, 2023, the court returned to pre-pandemic operations, though some of the changes adopted, like telephonic and video hearings in routine hearings, remain in place because of the convenience and efficiency they offer.

Judge Pallmeyer reported that the district saw a 4% increase in civil case filings in 2022, while criminal case filings were down 26%. In 2022, the court held 42 civil jury trials and 36 criminal jury trials, up significantly from a total of 50 (civil and jury trials combined) in 2021. In December 2022, the court lifted COVID-19 precautions for juries, which had limited the number of jurors summoned each day and required the use of three courtrooms for every jury trial. Since December 2022, the court has been summoning jurors at pre-pandemic levels and conducting jury trials in a single courtroom. Thus, in the first 5 months of 2023, the court has already conducted 24 criminal and 22 civil jury trials.

Chief Judge Pallmeyer shared that the court was saddened by the death of Judge William Thomas Hart, who died on January 17, 2023, at the age of 93. Judge Hart was passionate about preserving and celebrating court history. He will be honored at a memorial service in the Dirksen Courthouse later this year.

Judge Pallmeyer reported many changes on the bench. Judge John Z. Lee was nominated by President Biden to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, confirmed by the Senate, and received his commission September 9, 2022. Judge Norgle assumed inactive senior status on October 4, 2022. Judge Ronald Guzman, who served as a Magistrate Judge beginning in 1990 and then as a District Judge since 1999, took inactive senior status earlier in June.

In December 2022, Judge Robert Dow, Jr. was named Counselor to U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. Though Judge Dow retains his seat on the bench, his new assignment creates a vacancy. Judge Gary Feinerman (ret.) also left the bench in December 2022, returning to the practice of law. On December 26, 2023, Judge Thomas Durkin will assume senior status, and he plans to continue to maintain an active caseload as a senior judge.

In October 2022, Judge Nancy Maldonado was sworn in as a district judge. She is the first Latina to serve as an Article III judge in the district. She fills the seat vacated by Judge Kennelly, who took senior status on October 7, 2021. In February 2023, Judge Lindsay Jenkins was sworn in as a district judge, filling the seat vacated by Judge Lee. On June 2, 2023, Judge LaShonda Hunt was sworn in as a district judge. She fills the seat vacated by Judge Norgle.

Jeremy C. Daniel was also confirmed by the Senate and is expected to be sworn in as a District Judge sometime this summer. Judge-designate Daniel served as law clerk to Judge Virginia Kendall before practicing law, most recently as an Assistant United States Attorney. He will fill the seat created when Gary Feinerman returned to the private practice of law.

In January 2023, U.S. Magistrate Judge Young B. Kim was appointed as Chief Magistrate Judge when Chief Magistrate Judge Sheila M. Finnegan completed her term in that position. This is another historic first for the court as Judge Kim is the first Asian American to hold this position in the district. Consistent with the practice in a number of other federal courts, in November 2022, the court's Executive Committee voted to replace the title "Presiding Magistrate Judge" with "Chief Magistrate Judge."

On August 9, 2023, Magistrate Judge Susan E. Cox will retire from the court. In April, the court selected Keri Holleb Hotaling to fill the vacancy created when Judge Cox retires.

Judge Pallmeyer reported that in calendar year 2022, the court conducted 836 naturalization ceremonies in the district, swearing in 32,870 new citizens, up 33% from last year. This includes ceremonies at special venues throughout the district including Wintrust Arena, Wrigley Field, Guaranteed Rate Field, Cantigny Park, Naval Station Great Lakes, Coronado Performing Arts Center, Chicago Botanic Garden, Daley Plaza, College of DuPage's McAninch Arts Center, and Rockford University.

Judge Pallmeyer also noted developments in court security, including Congress' appropriation of funds for demolition of dilapidated, vacant buildings that sit feet from the courthouse and were purchased by GSA in 2005 as a security buffer for the Dirksen Courthouse. All four properties lie adjacent to the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse and are within the downtown Loop Retail Historic District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

As required by law, GSA has engaged in a careful review of the project and of potential alternatives, beginning with a Public Scoping Meeting in November of 2022. Together with the City of Chicago, GSA, and all consulting parties, the court is following procedures required by National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to address the future of these buildings. Judge Pallmeyer noted the court's recognition of the need to consider viable reuse alternatives to demolition, recognizing the cost and benefits of those alternatives, while maintaining our focus on the significant security concerns these buildings represent to the Courthouse.

More recently, GSA has conducted a conditions assessment report and determined that the building located at 208-212 State had such significant structural issues that immediate demolition was necessary to protect public safety. The demolition of 208-212 State began in April 2023 and is expected to be completed late July of 2023.

As planned, the redevelopment project will fortify security surrounding the Courthouse, demolish the dilapidated structures, and create green space in a plaza between the Courthouse and State Street. The project would also help to restore architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's vision for the Chicago Federal Center Complex. Judge Pallmeyer observed that while the proposed demolition of the abandoned buildings represents a loss, this project could have the benefit of displaying the inviting open appearance of the

Courthouse, itself a mid-century modern architectural treasure. Her hope is that the result of the consultation process will preserve public safety, enhance the dignity of the neighborhood, draw in visitors to the State Street Corridor, and beautify that Corridor as well as the Chicago Federal Center Complex.

On January 31, 2023, the court unveiled 13 photos of the missing judges in the James Benton Parsons Ceremonial Courtroom—finally completing the court’s collection of judicial photos. Richard Cahan, author of Chicago Rules: Federal Cases that Defined the City and the Nation, helped secure these missing photos and shared his process in an unveiling event. Judges Thomas Durkin and Manish Shah and Professor Chris Schmidt of the Chicago-Kent College of Law made presentations that highlighted the unique history and contributions of four of the judges -- Henry Williams Blodget, George E.Q. Johnson, Kennesaw Mountain Landis, and James Wilkerson -- in the newly-acquired photographs.

Judge Pallmeyer noted that diversity, equity, and inclusion remain a priority for the district. The District Court Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, chaired by Magistrate Judge Gabriel Fuentes, offered DEI training for judges and court staff and programming for the greater community over the last year. In October 2022, in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, the Committee hosted a seminar with the ABA – “Unidos for a Stronger Judiciary: Building a Foundation of Inclusivity for the Hispanic/Latinx Pipeline to the Bench and Bar.” In February, in conjunction with the Federal Bar Association, the Committee hosted an event honoring the life of Judge Blanche M. Manning and celebrating her historic contributions to the state and federal bench in honor of Black History Month. In May, in celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, the Committee co-hosted “When Citizenship Depended on Race,” two Supreme Court case reenactments, panel discussion, and naturalization ceremony. That event was co-hosted by the Federal Bar Association, Chicago Chapter, and the Asian American Bar Association of Chicago.

Judge Pallmeyer noted that the diverse experiences and backgrounds of new judges recently joining the court have enhanced the diversity of the bench. Diversity enhances the public’s confidence in the federal court system and can result in more sensitive and effective jurisprudence, a matter of vital importance in a nation governed by the rule of law.

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