

Court Information Release



United States District Court
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
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Chief Judge Castillo delivers annual “State of the Court” Address

CHICAGO, Ill. – Just over one week into his fifth year as Chief Judge for the U.S. District Court for Northern District of Illinois, Chief Judge Rubén Castillo delivered the annual State of the Court Address at a luncheon sponsored by the Chicago Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. Judge Castillo highlighted the court’s initiatives and projects over the last year and his hopes and plans for the future of the court.

The Northern District of Illinois is among the busiest courts in the nation with 9,934 civil case filings in 2017. In addition, 708 criminal cases were filed in the Northern District of Illinois in 2017, up 4.1% from 2016.

The Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois again leads the nation with the most filings of any bankruptcy court in the country. With 41,448 case filings in the 12-month period ending March 31, 2018 and only 11 judges, it outranks the second busiest bankruptcy court, the Central District of California, with 38,062 pending cases before 26 judges.

There are currently four judicial vacancies on the District Court. Three nominees are awaiting confirmation by the U.S. Senate. District Judge Frederick J. Kapala announced he will assume Senior Status in May 2019.

Incumbent U.S. Magistrate Judges Jeffrey T. Gilbert, Sheila M. Finnegan, and Young B. Kim were each reappointed to new eight-year terms. U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael T. Mason announced he will retire in January 2019. Applications for two U.S. Magistrate Judges are currently under review of the Magistrate Judge Merit Selection Panel.

The Court has continued efforts to improve the diversity of juries in the district. The Court began a new jury wheel in 2018, which now includes records from the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The Court also began a project to contact non-respondent jurors by postcard. In January 2018, the Court launched its [new juror orientation video](#). Individuals reporting for jury service at the Northern District of Illinois now see an inspiring, fast-paced film that highlights the diversity of the District and incorporates footage from throughout the District, including both the Roszkowski and Dirksen U.S. Courthouses.

In May 2018, the Court opened a new history museum on the 21st floor of the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse. The new museum is open to the public and features interactive video displays, lecture space, video listening stations, artifacts, and art which feature significant people, places, and cases that have impacted the Court and greater community in the last 200 years.

As the Court prepares to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of federal courts in Illinois in March 2019, the Court History Museum will serve as the site of a number of lectures and panels. In addition, a documentary film highlighting the Court's impact on the community and the nation is currently in production.

A number of additional improvements have been made to enhance courthouse facilities and technology. Forty-three courtrooms within the district, 40 in Chicago and 3 in Rockford, are now fully equipped with digital video evidence presentation systems. Renovation has been completed on three Chicago grand jury hearing rooms to include digital video evidence presentation systems.

The Court has continued to expand programs that promote what Chief Judge Castillo has deemed "smart compassion." In December 2017, the Court honored its first class of graduates from its new Veterans Treatment Court. With the assistance of the John Marshall Law School Veterans Legal Support Center and Clinic, charged veterans may enter into a diversion agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office under which they meet monthly with a U.S. Magistrate Judge and complete programs focusing on PTSD, anger management, mental health, drug and alcohol addiction. Veterans who successfully complete treatment and commit no new offenses will not be prosecuted.

In May 2018, the Court honored its first graduating class of the Sentencing Options that Achieve Results (SOAR) Program, an 18-24 months long pre-trial alternative program. SOAR Court defendants receive intensive supervision as they focus on their sobriety, are involved in goal setting to increase their education levels, seek or maintain constructive employment and maintain a productive lifestyle. Successful completion of the program results in either the imposition of a non-custodial sentence, reduction to a misdemeanor conviction, or possible dismissal of the criminal charges.

The Court's James B. Moran Second C.H.A.N.C.E. Re-entry Program continues to thrive and has expanded to two separate sessions. The Second C.H.A.N.C.E. Program assists former inmates in reintegrating into the community and living law-abiding lives after they are released from

prison. Bi-monthly court sessions address participants' progress and performance on federal supervision. Individuals who successfully complete the Second C.H.A.N.C.E. Program are rewarded with a reduction of federal supervision.

The Court has continued to expand its community outreach efforts, such as judicial presentations and educational programs with bar associations and law schools. In April 2018, the Court co-sponsored, "May It Please the Court: Women as Lead Trial Lawyers Symposium," which was attended by 500 attorneys. The chief judge and five of the district's judges alongside state court judges, general counsels, firm partners, and government attorneys spoke on five panels that each addressed strategies and best practices to empower women as lead counsel and trial counsel in litigation.

The Court continues to expand its own "Courtroom as Classroom" youth outreach program, in which two hundred Chicago Public Schools high school students from the all sides of the city met with judges, attorneys, federal law enforcement officers, and courthouse employees to learn about the judiciary and career opportunities in the justice system.

As he looked ahead, Chief Judge Castillo said his focus will be on improving the security of the district's courthouses, preparing the Court for its 200th Anniversary, and leaving the Court a little stronger.

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