

Court Information Release



United States District Court
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
219 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60604

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District court increases pro bono expense reimbursement in response to feedback from federal trial bar

CHICAGO, Ill.- The District Court in the Northern District of Illinois has increased reimbursement expense limits in pro bono cases filed on or after February 1, 2016. The changes were motivated by feedback from the court's October 2015 survey of the Northern District of Illinois trial bar.

Pursuant to the newly-amended regulations, the judge to whom a pro bono case is assigned is authorized to approve reimbursements up to \$2500, not including expenses related to hiring a court interpreter. If non-interpreter expenses exceed \$2500, the judge will forward the request to the chief district judge, who may approve expenses up to \$5000. If a case involves difficult or complex matters, prior to incurring expenses over \$5000, the pro bono attorney may petition the Executive Committee of the district court to approve additional expenses by submitting a written request for preapproval to the assigned judge, who upon approval will forward to the chief district judge. With the approval of the chief district judge, the request will be forwarded to the Executive Committee for review and approval.

Prior to today's reimbursement changes, reimbursement expenses were capped at \$1000 and included interpreter costs. Previously, if reimbursements exceeded \$1000, the judge could forward the request along with a recommendation to the chief judge, who could approve reimbursement costs up to \$3000. In the court's recent trial bar survey, attorneys indicated that the reimbursement rate was often insufficient to cover expenses incurred in pro bono representation.

"As we indicated to attorneys when we undertook the survey, we take the trial bar's feedback seriously and are working to make improvements and changes to lead this court into the future.

The increase in pro bono reimbursements will impact every member of the trial bar. This improvement is the first of a number of initiatives we are undertaking based on the survey results,” stated Chief Judge Rubén Castillo.

“By streamlining the reimbursement process and increasing the reimbursement caps, we are making it easier for pro bono lawyers to more effectively represent their clients, which benefits everyone,” stated Bob Glaves, Executive Director of the Chicago Bar Foundation and Chair of the Northern District of Illinois Pro Bono Advisory Committee.

When a trial bar attorney has been recruited pursuant to Local Rule 83.36 to represent an indigent party in a civil proceeding in the Northern District of Illinois, that attorney is allowed to petition the court for reimbursement of expenses such as deposition and transcript costs, expert services and other costs incurred in preparation and presentation of the proceeding.

In 2015, 596 attorneys were recruited to pro bono cases in the Northern District of Illinois, up significantly from 204 attorneys in 2007. Pro bono reimbursement expenses are paid out of the District Court Fund, which is funded by general and trial bar admission fees.

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