

From 20 Countries to One Oath: 53 New Citizens Sworn in at Rockford Public Library



U.S. District Judge Iain D. Johnston administers the Oath of Allegiance

Fifty-three people walked into the Rockford Public Library on Monday, June 1, 2026, having come from 20 different countries.

They left, all of them, as the newest citizens of the United States.

The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois held a naturalization ceremony inside the library's new Main Branch, marking the first time the Court has partnered with the Rockford Public Library to host the ceremony in the new downtown space along the banks of the Rock River.

A crowd of about 200 people gathered as citizenship candidates took the Oath of Allegiance before **U.S. District Judge Iain D. Johnston**. Families, friends and loved ones watched as the candidates completed the final step in their journeys to citizenship.

"This is the land where faith in yourself, faith in your family and community, and faith in the Constitution will be rewarded," Judge Johnston told the crowd. "That may not happen immediately, but give it a chance. Remember, this Nation is all about chances."

For **Ruben Villegas**, who emigrated from Mexico, the moment was deeply personal.

"I'm so proud of this today," Villegas said. "It has been a long way to get here, and I am excited to be a citizen of the United States. It's a dream."

The new citizens represented 20 countries from around the world - a reflection of the many different paths that led them to the same oath.



Ruben Villegas, who emigrated from Mexico, takes the Oath of Allegiance during the ceremony.



New citizens listen as U.S. District Judge Iain D. Johnston delivers remarks during a naturalization ceremony at the Rockford Public Library.

The library's new Main Branch, located on Wyman Street and a short walk from the Western Division Courthouse, provided a fitting setting for the ceremony.

Naturalization ceremonies are among the most meaningful proceedings held by the federal court. They are formal court proceedings, but they are also deeply personal milestones - moments that recognize the rights, responsibilities and promise of citizenship.

By the end of the ceremony, the 53 citizenship candidates had taken the oath, received their certificates and stepped forward as new Americans.

"Being American is not based on where your ancestors came from," Judge Johnston said. "Being American is based on your understanding and belief in the core principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution - freedom, liberty and equality."

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