



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

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**Contact:** Julie Hodek, Public Information Officer  
United States District Court for  
the Northern District of Illinois  
219 S. Dearborn St., #2548  
Chicago, IL 60604  
312-435-5693

### **Chief Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer Delivers Her First State of the Court Virtually**

Chicago, Ill. – On June 10, 2020, Chief Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer delivered her first State of the Court remarks in a webinar sponsored by the Federal Bar Association, Chicago Chapter. Judge Pallmeyer reviewed major developments at the district court and outlined plans for the Court’s return to courthouse operations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our nation and district are facing tremendous challenges. While operations in our district may look and feel different, this Court will continue to uphold the Constitution and resolve disputes fairly, honestly, justly without reference to fear, prejudice or public opinion,” said Chief Judge Pallmeyer.

Given the public health emergency arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and with guidance from federal, state, and local health authorities, the Court has limited in-courthouse proceedings since mid-March. Emergency judges have been on-site at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse, conducting hearings on emergency matters in civil and criminal cases. All other judges and staff have been working from home, relying on technology. The Court extended certain deadlines and ordered non-emergency proceedings be conducted remotely through telephone or video conference. Since mid-March, more than 1,350 new civil cases have been filed. Attorneys have filed more than 7,200 motions, and judges have entered 34,200 orders. In addition, the emergency judges have handled over 500 emergency motions filed since the start of the pandemic.

Chief Judge Pallmeyer also reported that she appointed the ReStart Task Force to plan for the safe resumption of operations at the courthouse. Members include District Judges Matthew F. Kennelly, Chair; John J. Tharp, Jr.; Manish S. Shah; Magistrate Judge Susan E. Cox; and Thomas G. Bruton, Clerk of Court.

In her remarks, Chief Judge Pallmeyer also reported that on May 27, 2020, she issued a courthouse order requiring all persons in the Dirksen and Roszkowski U.S. Courthouses to wear a face covering or mask in the public areas of the courthouses including the lobby, elevator banks, restrooms, public corridors, and unless excused by the presiding judge, courtrooms. The only persons excepted from this requirement are those who provide documentation that they are unable, for medical reasons, to wear a face covering.

Beginning June 15, 2020, the Court will move to its next phase of resuming limited courthouse activity. Judges will have access to their assigned courtrooms on a part-time schedule that limits the number of judges and staff in the building at any one time. Judges will use that court time only for necessary in-person matters. During this phase, the courtrooms will be open to the public. The Court will continue, however, to strongly encourage reliance on written rulings and, where necessary, remote telephone/video hearings in lieu of court appearances. The Court, on its website, has issued other health and safety precautions related to social distancing, building entry procedures, and elevator occupancy.

“As we continue to navigate these challenging times, please know that your safety and the safety of courthouse staff and the public is our primary concern,” Judge Pallmeyer added.

Four new district judges – Judges Mary M. Rowland, Martha M. Pacold, Steven C. Seeger, and John F. Kness – have joined the bench in the last year. There are currently two district judge vacancies on the court. Two district judge nominees – U.S. Magistrate Judge Iain D. Johnston and Judge Franklin U. Valderrama of the Circuit Court of Cook County – are awaiting confirmation by the U.S. Senate. Magistrate Judges Beth W. Jantz and Heather K. McShain also joined the Court’s magistrate bench in early 2020.

Throughout 2019, the court community continued to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of federal courts in Illinois. Bicentennial events included a summer institute for teachers; a judicial oral history interview series; court history symposia; a portrait dedication and ceremony at the Roszkowski U.S. Courthouse; the debut of an hour-long documentary, “A Court at the Heart of America” on WTTW PBS Channel 11; and the release of “Chicago Rules,” a pictorial history book on many of the district’s noteworthy cases.

On December 10, 2019, the Court opened the American Dreams Playroom for families attending naturalization ceremonies at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse. The Playroom features books in Spanish and English, a multilingual “Welcome” mural and toys for children of all ages.

Chief Judge Pallmeyer assumed her duties as Chief Judge on July 1, 2019 and is the district’s first female chief judge.

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