

Circuit Court of Cook County
Office of the Chief Judge
Technology Strategic Plan

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SECTION 1: ORGANIZATION

The Circuit Court of Cook County, which is part of the judicial branch of Illinois state government, is the largest of the 24 judicial circuits in Illinois and one of the largest unified court systems in the world. The court’s chief judge has general administrative authority over the court, subject to the administrative authority of the Illinois Supreme Court. The court has about 400 judges who serve the 5.2 million residents of Cook County within the City of Chicago and its 126 surrounding suburbs. More than 1 million cases are filed each year.

The Circuit Court of Cook County was created by a 1964 amendment to the Illinois Constitution, which reorganized the courts in Illinois. The amendment effectively merged the often confusing and overlapping jurisdictions of Cook County’s previous 161 courts into one uniform and cohesive trial court of general jurisdiction.

Today, the Circuit Court of Cook County is a unified court system in which all trial courts are consolidated under the chief judge, who coordinates and supervises the administrative functions of the court. The current chief judge is the Honorable Timothy C. Evans, who has served as chief judge since 2001.

Chief Judge Evans is responsible for the assignment of approximately 400 judges throughout the court's eleven divisions and six geographic districts and the appointment of a presiding judge to administer each division and district. The chief judge also oversees the court’s Surety Section and its Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Resource Section, appointing a judge to head each of those sections as well.

The Office of the Chief Judge (OCJ) is the administrative arm of the court. It prepares and administers the court's annual budget and supervises approximately 2,600 non-judicial employees, who work in 15 offices providing probation and other court-support services, including court reporting and foreign language interpreting.

For administrative and management purposes, the court has divided Cook County into six geographic districts. This allows the court to better serve the county’s large population.

The Circuit Court's six districts and the areas which they serve are:

<u>First Municipal District - Chicago</u>	City of Chicago
<u>Second Municipal District - Skokie</u>	Northern suburbs of Cook County
<u>Third Municipal District - Rolling Meadows</u>	Northwestern suburbs of Cook County
<u>Fourth Municipal District - Maywood</u>	Western suburbs of Cook County

<u>Fifth Municipal District - Bridgeview</u>	Southwestern suburbs of Cook County
<u>Sixth Municipal District - Markham</u>	Southern suburbs of Cook County

SECTION 2: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Using the administrative authority of the chief judge to support the court’s mission to deliver justice fairly and impartially, the **Information Services Department** was established to provide a broad range of information technology support and services to the judiciary, the OCJ, and the non-judicial operations under the authority of the chief judge, including: jury administration, human resources, legal research, information services, children’s rooms, official court reporters, office of interpreter services, office of accessibility and education outreach, expedited child support, family mediation services, parenting education program, forensic clinical services, juvenile court clinic, mandatory arbitration, public guardian, three probation departments, and the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

The information services department is organized according to the following key functional areas of support:

- **help desk** – intake of requests for assistance / ticket creation / assignment and tier 1 support
- **desktop** - desktop and peripheral device management
- **server** - file server /application server / database server and data storage management
- **application** - application design, development, support/maintenance and training
- **security** - system monitoring and security / disaster recovery
- **research** - research and evaluation of court and probation operations

The Information Services Department consists of 28 employees, who implement new technologies and services, respond to specific technology needs, and provide support for court IT initiatives in all court operations throughout Cook County.

SECTION 3: STAFFING

The Information Services Department is comprised of the following staff positions that support the key function areas of the department.

- Director
 - Network Engineer
 - SQL Server Database Administrator (Open Position x1)
 - Staff Attorney
- Help Desk Manager
 - Help Desk Administrator
- Operations Manager

- Desktop Technician
- Inventory Specialist (Open Position x1)
- Application Development Manager
 - Business Analyst
 - Application Developer
- Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) MacArthur Foundation Grant
 - Director
 - Administrative Assistant (SJC)
- Research and Evaluation Unit
 - Director – Research and Evaluation for Courts
 - Research Analyst (Open Position x1)
 - Research Analyst (SJC)
 - Research Assistant (Open Position x1)
 - Director – Research and Evaluation Probation
 - Senior Research Analyst
 - Research Analyst
 - Research Assistant (Open Position x1)

Staffing emphasis has recently been placed on expansion of the Research and Evaluation Unit, to support court administration and to comply with current and future reporting requirements of the Illinois Supreme Court. The Research and Evaluation Unit is strategically organized within the Information Services Department to streamline data extraction from various internal and external systems and to present data in usable formats for analysis. In addition, the court will hire a SQL Server Databases Administrator in FY2022 to manage the court’s SQL Server environment.

SECTION 4: INFRASTRUCTURE

The Information Services Department supports over 9,000 physical computing and peripheral devices across the court’s enterprise. This includes desktops, monitors, laptops, servers, storage arrays, printers, scanners, and multi-function peripherals. The OCJ routinely maintains and upgrades its computing environment to ensure reliability and consistency of computer technologies for judges and staff operating departments under the auspices of the Chief Judge. Replacing computers, laptops, printers and servers that are beyond their useful lifecycle ensures continuity of court operations as well as operational efficiencies, while providing court services to the public. The court requested nearly \$2.7 million over 3 years (FY2022 through FY2024) to upgrade its computer hardware that is beyond its useful lifecycle, however, less than 10% (\$200,000) was recommended

and appropriated for the court for FY2022. The court remains hopeful that consideration will be given in future years to invest in the necessary upgrades to the court's aging computing infrastructure.

The court utilizes the county's wide-area-network (WAN) and local-area-networks (LAN) to enable its computer users to access court, county and external network applications and resources.

SECTION 5: APPLICATION MANAGEMENT AND MODERNIZATION

The Information Services Department provides in-house business analysis, application and database design and development, application deployment, application training for administrators and end users, and ongoing system support and maintenance. For more than 20 years, the court has utilized LANSA for iSeries and LANSA for Windows to develop, deploy and support its applications. A majority of the court's applications currently reside on the iSeries (AS/400) and the Mainframe servers hosted by Ensono (formerly Acxiom).

In 2016, the court was advised by the Cook County Bureau of Technology (BOT) that it was considering moving away from the Mainframe and the iSeries and that the court should begin to re-develop away from these technologies to a more modern technology environment to host its databases and applications.

The court's major systems on the Mainframe are PROMIS, which is the case management system for Adult Probation (APD), Pretrial Services (PTS), and Social Service (SSD), and the Jury Administration System. The PROMIS System will be replaced by a modern probation case management system called cFive Supervisor, which is expected to be in operation at the end of January 2022. In-house staff is redeveloping the Jury Administration System, using the LANSA platform, and is expected to launch the new version in June 2023. By June 2023, the court expects to be off the Mainframe entirely.

The court's major systems on the iSeries (AS/400) include the Juvenile Enterprise Management System (JEMS) and various, critical line of business applications used for the administration of the court. Although JEMS was replaced by the cFive Supervisor System in November 2020, its use will be entirely discontinued only when the State's Attorney's Office implements its new case management system. This is due to various integrations that JEMS continues to support on behalf of the State's Attorney's Office. Finally, the court has made significant progress on the redevelopment of other in-house applications and expects have those applications off the AS/400 by January 2023. Getting entirely off the AS/400 depends greatly on the State's Attorney's Office implementing its new system.

SECTION 6: SECURITY

The Information Services Department is represented on the Bureau of Technology's Information Security Work Group, which meets monthly to discuss cybersecurity threats, policies, and standards.

Additionally, the court utilizes the county’s McAfee Enterprise Anti-Virus to protect endpoint computers and servers.

SECTION 7: INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT AND MODERNIZATION

The court has vastly expanded its technical capabilities through virtualization of its server environment, significantly reducing its physical server footprint. This will lead to long-term cost savings by retiring and not replacing physical servers after they are virtualized. Additionally, the court has implemented a robust SQL Server environment that includes load balancing, failover clustering, data replication, near-line data back-up, and digital tape back-ups to ensure protection and high availability for the court’s critical line of business applications. This infrastructure was required for the court to develop away from the Mainframe and AS/400 environments.

The court utilizes space in the county’s data centers, and relies on the county’s network infrastructure to support its file, application, database and storage servers.

SECTION 8: COURT TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION PROGRAM – BEST PRACTICES

In mid-2021, Chief Justice Burke, through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC), announced a \$10 million Court Technology Modernization Program grant opportunity that is available to all 24 judicial circuits in Illinois. Grant applications are due by February 4, 2022, with awards to be announced between March and May 2022.

As part of the modernization program, the AOIC contracted with Guidehouse to conduct a technology assessment of each of the judicial circuits. Cook County’s assessment was conducted in early November, with Guidehouse conducting site visits to the Daley Center, Domestic Violence Courthouse, Leighton Criminal Court Building, and the Rolling Meadows Courthouse. Representatives of the judiciary, OCJ, circuit clerk, state’s attorney, and public defender were present at each site visit. Upon statewide completion of the assessments in November 2021, the AOIC issued its “Court Technology Modernization Program – Best Practices” guide, which provides standards for circuit courts throughout the State of Illinois. Additionally, Guidehouse prepared the following list of recommendations specific to the Circuit Court of Cook County. The court will create a priority list from the items below to submit in its funding application.

Recommendation	Justification
Procure evidence display systems for courtrooms	To enable evidence presentation and facilitate hybrid hearings in courtrooms.
Procure evidence display systems for jury deliberation rooms	To enable evidence presentation in jury deliberation rooms.

Procure and install a dedicated wireless internet network for the courthouse	To support electronic court operations, remote proceedings, and public self-help capabilities.
Procure and install audio equipment, including microphones and speakers, in all courtrooms	To enable amplification for in-person and hybrid hearings and integrate with court recording systems.
Procure white noise machines for courtrooms	To enable judges to have side bars with litigants without having to move from the bench, attorney table and court reporter table.
Procure and install additional monitor with collapsible monitor mounts for all judges' benches.	To enable judges to view zoom and access electronic case files simultaneously. Collapsible monitor mounts will enable judges' line of sight with courtroom participants and proceedings.
Install wireless access points	To allow for connection throughout the courthouse.
Explore the possibility of electronic signatures	To enable judges and clerks to sign documents electronically through Odyssey.
Explore possibility of improving the internet network at the county jail	To facilitate reliable remote/hybrid hearings conducted between the courthouse and jail.
Procure rolling lobby docket	To ensure the schedule is easily available to courthouse visitors

It should be noted that, on behalf of local criminal justice stakeholders, the OCJ submitted a FY2022 Capital Improvement Project (CIP) request in the amount of \$20 million over 5 years, to design, develop, and implement state-of-the-art evidence presentation technology in all criminal, civil, and traffic courtrooms throughout Cook County. The OCJ is leading this collaborative effort of the state's attorney, public defender, sheriff, circuit clerk, and offices under the president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. For FY2022, \$300,000 was appropriated for CIP Project 26978, "Courtroom Technology AV/IT Upgrades," and the court will be working with Capital Planning and the stakeholder workgroup in the coming months to prepare and release the RFP to hire the consultant on this project. This project will incorporate some of the recommendations made by the AOIC and Guidehouse.

SECTION 9: IT CONTRACTS

To achieve the most competitive rates for commodities and services, the court works closely with the Bureau of Technology in the development of RFPs for shared technology and participates in all of the countywide technology contracts for hardware, software and support services. The court attempts to first use a countywide technology contract before consideration is given to issuing its own bid, RFQ, or RFP.

SECTION 10: FY2022 AND BEYOND

In addition to the routine, annual technology refresh project, the court intends to turn its focus to the design and development of state-of-the art courtrooms. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the various technology limitations of courtrooms throughout the county, such as:

- Lack of availability of robust AV equipment necessary for judges to conduct simultaneous remote/in-person proceedings;
- Lack of comprehensive Wi-Fi infrastructure for internet access at most court facilities for use by the public and employees;
- Additional collapsible monitors needed by judges at the bench to conduct remote proceedings while maintaining access to the clerk's case management system
- Lack of courtroom audio integration with videoconference technology (e.g., Zoom);
- Inability to hear within courtrooms (with and without amplification) due to the installation of plexiglass;
 - Judges, clerks, jurors, litigants and court reporters all face hearing difficulties in the courtroom.
- Lack of technology (such as white noise) to facilitate sidebars without requiring judges, attorneys and court reporter to huddle at the side or front of the bench;
- Lack of sufficient mobile devices, printers and scanners for judges and staff to conduct court proceedings remotely;
- Lack of ability of judges to electronically sign court orders;
- Lack of sufficient kiosks (e.g., "Zoom Rooms") at all court locations for underserved and pro se litigants to use to access remote proceedings while at the courthouse;
- Lack of sufficient equipment to live-stream bench or jury trials to other courthouse space when there is a large media and/or public interest in observing the proceedings;
- Lack of available, active data jacks/wireless access points in courtrooms to access the internet for conducting proceedings by videoconference (e.g., Zoom).

As previously stated, the OCJ is leading a collaborative effort with the state's attorney, public defender, sheriff, circuit clerk, and offices under the president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners to provide state-of-the-art evidence presentation technology in all criminal, civil, and traffic courtrooms throughout Cook County.

The strategic goal of the court and the other stakeholders is to establish a state-of-the-art evidence presentation system in all courtrooms throughout the court that are standardized to enable the presentation of both physical and digital evidence in criminal, civil, and traffic matters in a uniform and standardized way in any courtroom, thus eliminating the need for stakeholders to purchase separate and oftentimes duplicate presentation equipment. The system will be standardized, reduce training for judges and litigants, improve case processing, eliminate duplicate purchasing and need to move equipment - reducing wear and tear - integrate with sound systems, connect to video conference platforms, enable annotation and preservation of evidence and enable hybrid remote and in-person proceedings.

The court and Capital Planning are in the process of seeking guidance from the National Center of State Courts as to best practices for use of the technology in courtrooms. The system will incorporate such guidance, along with the Illinois Supreme Court's minimum courtroom standards. Once fully implemented, the system will enable court proceedings to be conducted in both the normal course of business and during a pandemic situation and ensure justice can be served as efficiently, fairly, and safely as possible.

The court is confident that, with a commitment of courtroom technology investments from the county via the CIP Project [26978](#) for "Courtroom Technology AV/IT Upgrades" and from the Illinois Supreme Court's "Court Technology Modernization Program" grant opportunity (both of which are collaborative initiatives among the justice system stakeholders), the Circuit Court of Cook County will be a model courtroom technology for all courts throughout Illinois and across the nation.