

Special Report on the Illinois Courts
2008 Issues Briefing
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The Illinois Court System

Illinois is one of four states [along with California, Iowa and Minnesota] with a unified court system: Trial [courts of general jurisdiction], Appellate [intermediate] and Supreme [court of last resort]. It was not always so. In 1962 Illinois had a confusing array of lower courts with overlapping jurisdictions. Cook County, for example, had 208 courts: Circuit, superior, family, criminal, probate, county, Chicago Municipal, 23 other municipalities, 75 justice of the peace courts and 103 police magistrate courts. Today Cook County has one court with a Chief Judge who oversees the various divisions.

LWWIL Involvement

- In 1949, after extensive study, the LWWIL reached consensus on the requirements for an effective judicial system.
- Despite League support, the effort to amend the 1870 Constitution in 1958 narrowly failed to meet the required 2/3 majority.
- In 1962 the LWWIL helped win approval of a Judicial Amendment that modernized the court system, created an administrative authority vested in the Supreme Court, and paved the way for a new Juvenile Court Act.
- In preparation for the 1970 constitutional convention, the League recommended changes in the tenure and selection of judges but otherwise approved the earlier work.

Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts – Probation Services

Probation officers and juvenile detention staff in Illinois are employees of the Chief Circuit Judge and paid directly by counties where they serve. Counties receive state reimbursement for part of the cost of probation services through an appropriation to the Supreme Court. Each jurisdiction is required by the state to submit an annual probation plan to the Supreme Court in order to receive state reimbursement.

LWWIL Involvement

- 1899. Much to Julia Lathrop's disappointment, probation services were not included in the original Juvenile Court Act.
- 1965. One of the innovations in the Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1965 was the provision for reimbursing juvenile probation officers.
- 1973. The LWWIL reached consensus on probation. At the time, services were uneven or non-existent. Also at issue was whether the executive or the courts should administer probation. The League supported a series of measures that failed to advance.

- 1979. Enactment of reform legislation that provided salary reimbursements for probation personnel who met state standards of education, training and experience.
- 1985. HB 777 [PA 84-823] was regarded as the final step in building a state and local partnership to provide comprehensive and uniform probation and related court services.
- The League continues to emphasize the cost-effectiveness of community-based interventions and treatment for appropriate juvenile and adult offenders, rather than incarceration.

AOIC Event

Passing the Torch, the 2007 Probation and Court Services Managers Symposium, sponsored by the AOIC, National Institute of Corrections [NIC] and the Crime and Justice Institute [CJI], was held in November in Oak Brook. On hand to greet attendees were AOIC Director Cynthia Cobbs and Assistant Director, Probation Services Division, Cheryl Barrett. Director Cobbs is the first African American woman in the United States to lead a state court administrative office.

Five years ago Illinois and Maine were chosen as pilot sites to develop an integrated approach to evidence-based principles in community corrections. The event celebrated what has been accomplished since 2002 and marked the passing of the torch to two new sites: California [Orange County] and Arizona [Phoenix]. The event also focused on identifying strategies to “keep the flame burning” in Illinois by further developing capacities of probation leadership in the state.

LWVIL Involvement. Represented on the Statewide Policy Team.

Web sites

- www.state.il.us/court Supreme Court justices, appellate justices, lists of circuit judges and associate judges by circuit [22 numbered circuits and Cook County]. See also Administrative Office – Probation Services.
- www.ipcsa.org - Illinois Probation and Court Services Association [IPCSA], a professional organization that has actively promoted improved probation services for juveniles and adults. Information by circuit: court house addresses, judges, probation officers, detention staff and specialized units.