**Background about Illinois Supreme Court**

**Commission on Access to Justice Forms Committee**

Spring 2015

**The Statewide Problem:**

* Individuals who wish to secure the protection of our civil legal system, often as a matter of necessity, choose to represent themselves. Courts across the country, including in Illinois, have seen an increasing number of people without lawyers who are representing themselves in legal proceedings.
* One obvious reason is cost. Many Illinois households either do not qualify for legal aid or legal aid services are not available to them and they simply cannot afford to pay the retainers and/or hourly fees of attorneys in private practice. In 2013, there was one legal aid staff attorney for every 7,227 low-income residents.

**Forms Committee Purpose:**

* The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice Forms Committee ("Forms Committee") develops statewide standardized court forms to improve access to the civil justice system for all court users, particularly those who are low-income and vulnerable.
* The Forms Committee serves as the leadership and reviewing body ultimately approving all draft and final statewide standardized court forms that are released by the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice.
* All forms approved by the Forms Committee are required to be accepted by all Illinois courts, but not mandatory for public usage. The only exception, at present, is that use of the *Application for Waiver of Court Fees* is mandatory per Illinois Supreme Court Rule 298. For more background information and examples of currently approved forms, please visit <http://www.illinoiscourts.gov/Forms/forms.asp>

**Forms Committee Logistics**:

* The Forms Committee usually meets once per month to review forms submitted by drafting subcommittees.
* Most Forms Committee meetings take place on weekday afternoons; Forms Committee meetings typically last 90 minutes to two hours, and take place via telephone/computer-conference.
* In between meetings, the Forms Committee must review detailed draft forms, orders and instructions and submit comments about the same. This review is often more time-consuming than the participation on the monthly calls.
* In order to participate as a member of the Forms Committee, each Forms Committee member must have access to a computer with an internet connection, access to a phone line or a computer microphone, commitment to attending Forms Committee calls and an interest in reviewing detailed documents for usability and legality.

**Forms Committee Demographics**:

* Current membership of the Forms Committee includes members of the judiciary, practitioners (including legal aid lawyers and members of the private bar), circuit clerks and law librarians.
* In addition to recruiting justice system stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, the Forms Committee seeks geographic diversity of its membership—seeking representatives from urban, suburban and rural court systems.