

Rural Practice

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Section on Rural Practice

Chair's Column

BY SARAH J. TAYLOR

I HOPE THIS FINDS EVERYONE DOING WELL. As we come to the end of the summer, I wanted to highlight a couple of recent projects of the ISBA Rural Practice Section.

First, we successfully held our first collaborative CLE event with a rural ISBA Affiliated Bar Association! On July 9th, 2026, the Rural Practice Section, ISBA Mutual Insurance Company, and the Fayette County Bar Association held a one-hour CLE program for local attorneys at the Fayette County Courthouse in Vandalia, Illinois. This event featured Honorable Jeffrey Goffinet, a retired judge from Williamson County, who presented on using AI evidence in court. Lunch was provided by ISBA Mutual, and ISBA President Perry Browder was a special



(L-R) President Perry Browder, Hon. Jeffrey Goffinet, Chair Sarah Taylor, ISBA Mutual Chief Relationship Officer Scott Dutton, & Fayette Co. Bar Association President Emily Fitch

guest. The event was well received and spurred enthusiasm for more such events in the future.

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Legislative Committee Update for Rural Practitioners

BY KAYLAN HUBER

PROPOSAL 25-09, OFFERED by Legal Aid Chicago, would amend Illinois Supreme Court Rule 46 by adding a new subsection specifically addressing protective-order proceedings. The proposed amendment would require courts to create and maintain a record of all proceedings under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act, Stalking No Contact Order Act, Civil No Contact Order Act, and

the applicable Criminal Code provisions, using either stenographic reporting or an approved electronic recording system. The proposal would also clarify that a "proceeding" includes every court date at which a protective order is issued, extended, modified, terminated, vacated, published, or served, even when the proceeding is consolidated with another

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Chair's Column

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One goal of this project is to help strengthen legal communities and bar associations in rural areas of Illinois. If your local rural bar association or group of attorneys in your area would like assistance in putting together a similar event, please email me at staylor@btbhh.com or Scott Dutton, ISBA Mutual's Chief Relationship Officer, at scott.dutton@isbamutual.com.

For more information about the ISBA's Affiliated Bar Program, you can visit: [Affiliated Bar Program | Illinois State Bar Association](#).

Also, the ISBA Rural Practice Fellowship Program application period is open! The deadline for applying for this program is **September 18th**. This program is designed to connect rural and small-town law firms looking for law clerks and associates with law students and attorneys interested in practicing law in rural communities in Illinois. For more information and the links to the applications: [Rural Practice Fellowship Program | Illinois State Bar Association](#).



You can learn more about the Rural Practice Section and how to join at: [Rural Practice | Illinois State Bar Association](#).

As always, please feel free to email me or staff liaison, Anita DeCarlo, adecarlo@isba.org, with any comments or suggestions for the Rural Practice Section.

■ Thanks!

Sarah J. Taylor

Chair, Rural Practice Section Council

Illinois New “Junk Fees” Alert for Residential Leases

BY NICKY VOGEL

ILLINOIS HAS ENACTED HOUSE BILL 3564 WHICH bans “junk fees” charged by landlords and adds new layers of transparency to residential lease agreements. This law takes effect on January 1, 2027, and will prohibit landlords from levying fees or fines for a residential lease modification or renewal, an eviction notice, after-hours maintenance requests, and routine maintenance. There will also be limits on charges for application fees and background checks at \$50 unless the actual cost of a third-party background check exceeds this amount. Landlords must also include a list of all nonoptional fees on the first page of the residential lease. If the landlord fails to properly list and disclose these fees, tenants are not required to pay these amounts. ■

This article was originally published in Real Property (July 2026, Vol. 72, No. 1), the newsletter of ISBA's Section on Real Estate Law.

Rural Practice

Published at least four times per year.
Annual subscription rates for ISBA members: \$35.

To subscribe, visit www.isba.org or call 217-525-1760.

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Legislative Committee Update

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case. In effect, the proposal seeks to ensure that protective-order proceedings consistently have an official, reviewable record.

Proposal 26-07 would amend Illinois Supreme Court Rule 906 to strengthen qualification and education requirements for attorneys appointed to represent children in child custody, allocation of parental responsibilities, visitation, parenting time, and certain guardianship matters. In particular, it would require attorneys, before qualifying for appointment, to complete four hours of approved continuing legal education on intimate partner domestic abuse within the preceding two years, covering topics such as family violence, coercive control, the effects of domestic abuse on children and

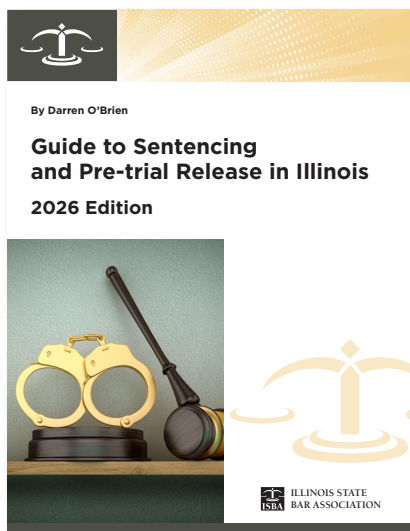
survivors, post-separation abuse, safety and risk management, and parenting plans; the proposal also recognizes specialized domestic-violence trainers, including Illinois Certified Domestic Violence Professionals, as potential training resources.

Proposal 26-06 would modernize Illinois Supreme Court rules governing post-judgment enforcement proceedings by rewriting Rule 277 to clarify and expand procedures for citations to discover assets, including permitting proceedings against judgment debtors and third parties, allowing written answers in lieu of appearances, encouraging remote proceedings, clarifying citation liens, and authorizing attorney-fee sanctions for noncompliance. It would also create

new Rule 278 establishing expedited procedures for judgment debtors to claim statutory exemptions from enforcement, including the ability to seek exemptions without a written motion at the return date, obtain expedited or automatic relief when uncontested, appear remotely, and use standardized statewide forms; the rule would require courts to liberally construe exemption statutes and recognize the ongoing nature of exemption rights. Finally, amendments to Rule 286 would clarify small-claims appearance and trial procedures, including allowing remote appearances and permitting courts to order written answers after the initial court date, while preserving the court's ability to conduct informal hearings. ■

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ISBA Books



Guide to Sentencing and Pre-trial Release in Illinois: 2026 Edition

This must-have book includes updates on sentencing and pre-trial release provisions that have changed since last year! It is fully updated for 2026 with all the changes from the SAFE-T Act, including an expanded and up-to-date section on the pre-trial release provisions that took effect on Sept. 18, 2023. Order your copy today!

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PRICING

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Pub Date: August 10, 2026

Format: Softcover

Pages: 175

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or by calling Member Services at **217-525-1760**

Rural Law Practice in the News— September 2026

BY SAM ELLIS & CARI BRETT RINCKER

LSAC continues rural access-to-justice webinar series

The Law School Admission Council continued its rural access-to-justice initiative during August and September 2026 through a webinar series focused on building rural pathways into the legal profession. The August 19 program, *Opening the Door: Rural Pathways to Law School*, addressed strategies for expanding awareness of legal careers, strengthening academic preparation, and connecting rural students to law school and legal practice.¹

The September 16 program, *Preparing Tomorrow's Rural Lawyers: Student Success and Community Impact*, focused on how law schools can equip students with the skills, experience, and connections needed to build meaningful rural practice careers and expand access to justice in underserved communities.

For rural practitioners, the series is significant because it treats attorney shortages as a pipeline issue that begins before bar admission. By emphasizing recruitment, preparation, and community impact, the initiative gives law schools and bar leaders a practical framework for developing future rural attorneys.

New York Permanent Commission announces September access-to-justice hearing

The New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice announced a public hearing scheduled for September 24, 2026, at the Court of Appeals in Albany. The Commission's work focuses on bridging the access-to-justice gap and ensuring that New Yorkers have meaningful access to courts and legal assistance for essential civil legal needs.²

The hearing follows continued attention to rural access issues in New York, including the state's recent efforts to expand representation and improve court procedures in rural communities. Public hearings of this type give legal aid providers, courts, bar associations, and community stakeholders an opportunity to identify barriers and propose practical solutions.

For rural courts and practitioners, the hearing is worth watching because stakeholder testimony can shape future court initiatives, funding priorities, and service-delivery models. It also reinforces that rural access to justice remains an active statewide policy concern.

State Justice Institute report remains a national reference point for legal deserts

The State Justice Institute's July 2026 report, *Legal Deserts in America*, continued to receive attention into August and September as a national reference point for understanding attorney shortages and unmet legal need. The report describes legal deserts

as areas where the number of practicing attorneys is insufficient to meet community needs, especially in rural America, Tribal communities, frontier regions, and economically distressed areas.³

The report compiles justice-gap research, county-level attorney data, geographic mapping, pilot program information, and interviews with national legal organizations. It emphasizes that low-income households experience high rates of unmet civil legal need and that attorney scarcity affects both civil and criminal justice systems.

For rural practitioners, the report remains useful because it frames legal deserts as a justice-system infrastructure issue and identifies models such as loan repayment, court navigators, legal aid partnerships, alternative service models, and rural recruitment pipelines for policymakers to consider.

New York's Rural Ready initiative continues building rural practice connections

New York's Rural Ready initiative continued to develop as a statewide effort to connect attorneys with rural career opportunities across upstate New York. Albany Law School announced earlier in 2026 that it would manage the initiative's website, which serves as a centralized resource for job postings by county and connections to local county ambassadors.⁴

The initiative is designed to strengthen access to justice in rural communities by making it easier for attorneys to evaluate rural practice opportunities and connect with lawyers and community leaders who understand local needs. Reports on the initiative noted that it had already produced concrete results, including a Hamilton County position being filled through the program.

NCSC highlights mapping tools for rural legal deserts

The National Center for State Courts continued to highlight rural justice resources in 2026, including mapping tools designed to help courts identify legal deserts and better understand where residents face the greatest barriers to legal services. The mapping resource uses geographic information systems to consider factors such as attorney availability, distance to courthouses, poverty rates, limited English proficiency, and broadband access.⁵

For rural practitioners, these mapping tools are useful because they translate broad access-to-justice concerns into local data. Courts, bar associations, legal aid organizations, and policymakers can use that information to target services, evaluate transportation and technology barriers, and design rural-specific strategies rather than relying on statewide averages alone.

Legal Services Corporation Rural Justice Task Force resources remain relevant for local solutions

The Legal Services Corporation's Rural Justice Task Force

materials remained a useful resource in August and September for courts, bar associations, and rural practitioners looking for practical responses to the rural justice gap. The Task Force identifies attorney shortages, the digital divide, distance and transportation barriers, and the need for community-specific trust-building as core rural access issues.⁶

The Task Force's work emphasizes that rural access solutions must be tailored to local culture, geography, infrastructure, and service capacity. Promising approaches include legal aid partnerships, technology-enabled service delivery, recruitment pipelines, court-based navigation, and community-rooted outreach.

For rural practitioners, these resources are useful because they highlight replicable strategies rather than one-size-fits-all

fixes. They also reinforce that local lawyers, courts, social-service providers, libraries, and community organizations all have roles to play in closing the rural justice gap. ■

1. Law Sch. Admission Council, *Rural Access to Justice*, <https://www.lsac.org/access-and-community-law-school/rural-access-justice> (last visited Sept. 10, 2026).
2. N.Y. State Unified Ct. Sys., *Permanent Commission on Access to Justice*, <https://www.nycourts.gov/permanent-commission-access-justice> (last visited Sept. 10, 2026).
3. State Justice Institute, *Legal Deserts in America: Examining the Justice Gap and Recommendations to Expand Access to Legal Services in Underserved Communities* (July 2026), https://www.sji.gov/wp-content/uploads/Legal_Deserts_Report_to_Congress_Final.pdf.
4. Albany Law Sch., *Rural Ready Partnership Expands; Albany Law School to Manage Website* (May 19, 2026), <https://www.albanylaw.edu/news/rural-ready-partnership-expands-albany-law-school-manage-website>.
5. Nat'l Ctr. for State Cts., *Mapping Barriers to Legal Services*, <https://www.ncsc.org/resources-courts/mapping-barriers-legal-services> (last visited Sept. 10, 2026).
6. Legal Servs. Corp., *Rural Justice Task Force*, <https://www.lsc.gov/initiatives/lsc-task-forces/rural-justice-task-force> (last visited Sept. 10, 2026).

Spotlight on a Rural Courthouse

What's New at the Jackson County Courthouse?

BY PATTI CLARK

THE JACKSON COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT is becoming more accessible and user-friendly with improvements and programs. To name a few:

Courtroom & jury assembly room improvements

The courthouse has completed significant improvements to its courtrooms and jury assembly area, enhancing accessibility, comfort, technology, and the overall experience for the public, attorneys, jurors, and court staff.

All courtrooms are now equipped with hybrid technology, allowing hearings to be conducted in person, remotely, or through

a combination of both. Most misdemeanor traffic and civil dockets are now held virtually through Zoom unless a party requests an in-person hearing. This increased flexibility makes court more convenient and accessible while helping reduce transportation challenges, parking shortages, security lines, and overcrowding in the courtrooms. Updated audio-visual equipment also provides improved sound quality and better support for presentations.

In addition to the technology upgrades, all courtrooms have been remodeled to create a more comfortable and welcoming environment. Jurors, witnesses, attorneys, and other courtroom participants now benefit from improved seating designed to provide greater comfort during lengthy proceedings. The first-floor courtroom has also been expanded, creating additional space for seating and improving overall comfort.

The courthouse jury assembly area, located in the basement, has undergone a complete renovation. The improvements include freshly painted walls and ceilings, new flooring, and sturdier, more comfortable chairs replacing the previous plastic seating. The restrooms have also been remodeled, with widened doors to improve accessibility and the addition of a gender-neutral restroom option.

Together, these improvements reflect the courthouse's continued commitment to providing modern, accessible, and user-friendly facilities while supporting the efficient administration of justice for the community.

Court Resource Center

Access to justice has always been a priority of the courts, and the Court Resource Center (CRC), located on the first floor of the



Illinois Courts website

courthouse, has become an important resource in advancing that goal.

The CRC provides a welcoming and accessible space for courthouse users, including self-represented litigants, attorneys, families, and members of the community. This space provides:

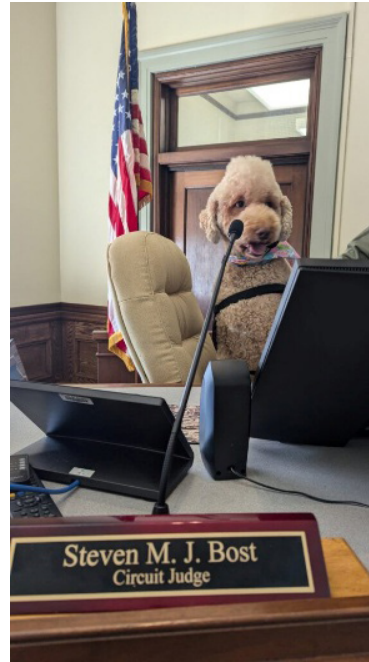
- **Resources for Self-Represented Litigants:** The CRC is equipped with public-use computers that allow self-represented litigants to access statewide approved court forms through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and participate in court proceedings through Zoom. Additional office equipment and supplies are available at no cost to public users.
- **Law Library Resources:** The CRC also serves as a digital law library. Court forms, legal research materials, and other information are available through the public computer area, providing courthouse users with convenient access to important resources.
- **Private Workspace for Attorneys:** A private office is available for attorneys who need a place to meet with clients, conduct depositions, or work when their own office space is unavailable. The office includes a computer, copier, workspace, and refrigerator for attorneys and clients who may need to use the room for an extended period.
- **A Welcoming Space for Families:** The CRC includes a waiting area with comfortable seating, magazines, and a water cooler. Special attention has been given to families with young children through the creation of a dedicated children's play area. The children's area includes tables and chairs, reading chairs, books, puzzles, crayons, crafts, and snacks. Through generous community donations, children are also encouraged to select a book and stuffed animal to take home with them.
- **Community and Educational Gathering Space:** The CRC provides gathering space for tours, meetings, receptions, and other events. This resource creates opportunities for schools and community organizations, including groups such as Learning in Retirement, to learn more about the courts and how the judicial system works.

The courts welcome opportunities to meet with members of the public and community organizations to provide information about the court system and the services available to courthouse users.

The Court Resource Center represents an ongoing commitment to improving access to justice and making the courthouse a more accessible, informative, and welcoming resource for everyone in Jackson County.

Court therapy dog

Court therapy dogs can play a unique and valuable role in the judicial process by reducing stress and anxiety in court proceedings during family court, juvenile abuse and neglect hearings, drug court, and other emotionally charged hearings.



Jackson County Courthouse
Companion Charlie

Charlie, our 8-year-old Goldendoodle and certified therapy dog through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, has been a beloved member of our courthouse team for almost two years. Charlie has become an integral part of the courthouse, particularly within the drug court program and juvenile abuse and neglect cases. His presence provides therapeutic support to participants navigating the justice system, many of whom experience significant emotional stress. He also brings additional joy to special occasions such as long-awaited adoptions.

Charlie is familiar with the routines and individuals involved, and he intuitively engages with those who may benefit most from his calming influence. While he certainly has a few favorites—possibly *because of the treats*—his role extends far beyond companionship. Charlie *helps create a* more supportive, trauma-informed courtroom *environment while advancing our goals of* increasing engagement, reducing stress, and promoting successful outcomes in treatment court.

Benefits of Court Therapy Dogs

- **Emotional Comfort**—Children and vulnerable individuals may feel more secure when interacting with a calm, friendly dog.
- **Improved Communication**—A therapy dog can help witnesses and crime victims, especially youth, feel more comfortable opening up during interviews and court proceedings.
- **Stress Reduction**—For individuals experiencing substance use challenges or trauma, a therapy dog can help reduce stress and provide comfort and support.
- **A calming presence for all**—Even court staff and legal professionals can benefit from spending a few minutes with a therapy dog.

Kids in the Courts

The Jackson County Circuit Court has developed an innovative program designed to introduce elementary school students to the American legal system. Aptly named **Kids in the Courts**, the program consists of two unique opportunities for students to learn about the judicial process.

Courthouse Tour: Designed for groups of up to 25 students, the Courthouse Tour provides an inside look at the functions of various courthouse offices, with special emphasis on the important role of the court system.

Shadow Program: In small groups, students observe and learn about the American judicial system from the unique perspective of sitting alongside judges and other courtroom personnel while court is actually in session.

A favorite part of the program is meeting Charlie, our court therapy dog!

We hosted several middle-school classes during the last school year and are excited to welcome students back to the courthouse soon. At the conclusion of the program, students are invited to submit essays describing what they learned during their time in court.

Judges and court staff who participated in the program read and score each essay anonymously, without the students' names attached. The winning essay earns the **"Charlie's Choice" Award**, and a judge, court representatives, and Charlie visit the student's school to present the award during a special student assembly.

Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)



One of our greatest achievements has been our partnership with [CASA of Southern Illinois](#). CASA has proven to be an invaluable and dedicated partner in our child protection system, helping ensure that the best interests of vulnerable children remain at the forefront of every case.

CASA advocates help safeguard the health, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. Their services extend from birth through age twenty-one for children who become involved in the juvenile court system through no fault of their own. These children are among the most vulnerable members of our community and require careful attention, consistent advocacy, and a steadfast commitment to their well-being.

The Court relies heavily upon the thorough investigations, detailed reports, and thoughtful recommendations provided by CASA advocates. Their work provides the Court with valuable insight into the circumstances and needs of each child, thereby assisting judges in making informed decisions concerning placement, services, permanency, and the child's best interests.

CASA volunteers work in partnership with the Department of Children and Family Services caseworkers, who frequently manage substantial caseloads while operating with limited resources.



Applications for the 2027-28 Rural Practice Fellowship Program are open and will close this Friday, September 18! The Program connects rural and small town law firms looking to hire law clerks and associates with law students and recent graduates interested in practicing law in rural communities of Illinois.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

Program Benefits for Rural Firms

- Assistance in identifying and hiring summer clerks and associates.
- Access to high-quality training and support to help integrate a fellow into your business.
- MCLE credit in connection with the program.

Program Benefits for Attorneys Considering Rural Practice:

- Support in identifying job placements in rural communities.
- Stipend to augment your salary, which totals \$10,000 for associates, to be paid \$5,000 at the beginning of the fellowship and \$5,000 after completion of the one-year program.
- Ongoing support through rural practice-focused programming, with MCLE credit available for those eligible.
- Assistance with building connections within the rural legal and local community.



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For more information or to submit an application, visit isba.org/ruralpractice

Unlike many professionals involved in the child protection system, a CASA advocate generally focuses on only one or two children at a time. This allows the advocate to maintain frequent and consistent contact with the child, family members, caregivers, service providers, and other individuals involved in the case.

Over the course of the proceedings, CASA advocates often become a trusted and stable presence in a child's life. Their commitment extends beyond the courtroom, ensuring that the child's voice is heard and that the child's needs remain visible throughout the judicial process.

The Jackson County Courts are grateful for the dedicated service of CASA of Southern Illinois and its volunteers. Their advocacy strengthens the child protection system and, most importantly, helps the Court fulfill its responsibility to protect the rights, safety, and best interests of every child who comes before it.

Drug Court

Established in January 2022, the [Jackson County Drug Court](#) is a collaborative effort between the criminal justice system and community treatment providers designed to reduce recidivism and break the cycle of substance abuse.

The program uses an evidence-based approach and works closely with community providers to connect participants with substance-abuse treatment, mental-health services, and other essential support. Research has shown that drug courts can significantly reduce crime compared with traditional case dispositions, with reductions averaging between 8 and 26 percentage points and, in some cases,

reaching as high as 35 percent.

Successfully completing Drug Court is no small accomplishment. Participants must demonstrate approximately two years of compliance while progressing through the program's rigorous, tiered structure. Throughout the process, participants engage in intensive treatment and therapy while working to address the behaviors, relationships, and social environments that have contributed to patterns of addiction and criminal behavior.

The Jackson County Drug Court recognizes that lasting change requires more than accountability in the courtroom. By combining judicial oversight with treatment, support, and personal responsibility, the program provides participants with the tools and opportunity to build healthier, more stable lives while contributing to a safer community.

Signage and information

We are currently in the process of installing new digital signage throughout the courthouse. These signs will provide easy-to-read docket information, maps and directories of offices within the courthouse, as well as announcements and other information of public interest regarding the courts and other county offices.

The informational signs will replace the multiple notices currently scattered throughout the building, consolidating that information into one easy-to-read format on a single screen. ■

Patti Clark is the Director of Court Operations for the Jackson County Courthouse in Murphysboro, Illinois.

New Member Directories *Now Available!*



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