



State of Illinois  
Circuit Court of Cook County

Chambers of  
Timothy C. Evans  
Chief Judge

50 West Washington Street  
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Richard J. Daley Center  
Chicago, Illinois 60602  
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October 6, 2021

Dear President Preckwinkle and Commissioners:

I write to inform you of the status of the court's response to the issues raised at the Board's meetings on July 28 and September 23, 2021. I assure you and your constituents that my staff, the Presiding Judge of the Domestic Violence Division, and I are working diligently and in concert with the advocacy community to resolve the issues recently brought to your and my attention surrounding access of survivors of domestic violence to court services.

Among the urgent issues raised by the commissioners at the board meeting on September 23 was the need to immediately commence providing people seeking emergency orders of protection access to judges outside of normal court hours. To address this need, on September 8, I amended General Administrative Order 2020-07 to provide after-hours access to on-call judges, commencing October 12. In light of the urgency expressed at the board meeting, on September 27, I amended the order to advance commencement of on-call access to October 5.

With the help of nine experienced judges currently assigned to the Domestic Violence Division, the court marshalled the resources necessary to begin conducting hearings outside of the court's usual business hours on weekdays, weekends, and court holidays on October 5. Our plan was to continue identifying and securing the additional resources necessary to support a robust array of services available to petitioners during the times the courthouses are closed.

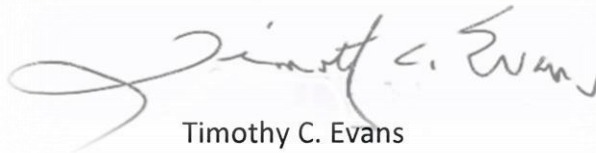
Subsequently, on October 1, the Presiding Judge, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, and I, along with members of our staffs, representatives of the President's office, and the Sheriff's General Counsel, had a videoconference with approximately 25 members of the domestic violence advocacy community. Our meeting was a productive one, and progress is underway to implement the advocates' suggestions as to how better to address the needs of the domestic violence survivors who seek court assistance, particularly those who do so on an emergency basis. At the advocates' request, among the immediate steps being taken are improvement of

access to foreign language interpretation, increased staffing for courtroom and videoconference coordination, special assistance to elderly and disabled court users, a technology audit, and additional judicial training.

The advocacy group representatives, the Clerk of the Circuit Court, and the Sheriff's General Counsel indicated that they would not be fully prepared by October 5 or October 12 to perform their roles in the court's after-hours operation as contemplated by GAO 2020-07. At their request and in the interest of creating the best possible system and ensuring the appropriate level of assistance to litigants at all times of the day, it was agreed to postpone the implementation of after-hours access for an initial period of approximately 30 days, until November 8, and thereafter at 30 day intervals until all participants are confident of their ability to participate effectively in providing this additional access. I have amended the order accordingly.

In the interim, I will be meeting with representatives of the advocates and the above offices to establish effective procedures and identify additional resources necessary to both improve and expand the court's services in emergencies and otherwise. I have also entered an order reestablishing the Circuit Court of Cook County Committee on Domestic Violence Court to review practices and procedures governing the hearing of domestic violence matters throughout the court and to review the organization and efficiency of Domestic Violence Division operations at the courthouses where domestic violence matters are heard. If you have any questions, please contact Katherine Nolan at [katherine.nolan@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:katherine.nolan@cookcountyil.gov).

Sincerely,



Timothy C. Evans  
Chief Judge

TCE:mw

cc: Hon. Raúl Vega, Presiding Judge  
Domestic Relations Division  
Hon. Iris Y. Martinez  
Clerk of the Circuit Court  
Hon. Thomas J. Dart, Sheriff  
Benna Crawford, Director  
Children and Families Practice Group  
Legal Aid Chicago  
Margaret Duval, Executive Director  
Ascend Justice