

CHICAGO BAR ASSOCIATION  
TASK FORCE ON  
GREEN COURTS INITIATIVE  
FOR THE  
CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY

FINAL REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DECEMBER 8, 2008

Note: To obtain the complete Task Force Report and Recommendations, please contact Wilma Billups at [wbillups@shesksylaw.com](mailto:wbillups@shesksylaw.com).

### III.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force on Green Courts for the Circuit Court of Cook County ("Task Force") began its work after a proposed resolution was introduced by Commissioner Michael Quigley to the Cook County Board that detailed the need for a "green initiative" in the courts and in law firms. With 41,000 attorneys in Cook County consuming nearly 40,000 tons of paper, and a Circuit Clerk's office processing over 40,000,000 pieces of paper annually, the resolution was encouraging the CBA to form this Task Force and work with the courts and law firms in Chicago to achieve a "paperless" legal system. This resolution provided a blueprint for the focus of our Task Force.

In addition, as the Task Force began its work, it did so with the knowledge that the Circuit Clerk of Cook County had received approval from the Administrative Office of the Illinois Court (AOIC) to begin an electronic filing pilot in the Law Division – Commercial Litigation. At the time the Task Force began its work, the pilot program was scheduled to begin in the fall of 2008.<sup>1</sup> Electronic filing would be one step towards a "paperless" court.

With this backdrop, the Task Force met in early November of 2007 to begin its work. The Task Force was divided into four subcommittees that met and provided written reports which became the backbone of this final report. Each subcommittee was charged with the task of how to implement an electronic-driven filing and storing of documents system in the Circuit Court of Cook County. The subcommittees were divided into the following areas: Technology, Marketing, Policy and Funding.

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<sup>1</sup> The pilot program in the Law Division, the Commercial Litigation Division, actually started in September of 2008 and is ongoing.

The Technology Subcommittee believed a cost-efficient and user-friendly electronic court services management system in Cook County was attainable from a technological perspective based upon a summary of what is currently in the market and the experience of other court systems. The Subcommittee outlined what services are presently available in other jurisdictions from imaging documents and pleadings to scheduling motions and court hearings. The hope was that these services could be provided in Cook County. Based upon information from courts that have these systems, the Technology Subcommittee found that with an implementation of an electronic court services management system that the volume of paper diminishes; fewer documents are misplaced; time to process documents decreases; and the system provides more efficiency. The Subcommittee also noted the benefits to the environment. The Subcommittee hoped that a statewide electronic system would someday be available to all users.

The Marketing Subcommittee believed that the success of initiating an electronic court services management system in Cook County will depend upon a buy-in of the principal stakeholders, which they identified as lawyers, judges, government agencies, *pro se* litigants, businesses and state and county officials. The Marketing Subcommittee addressed how to engage each of these group of stakeholders, and proposed a marketing strategy that involves educating, training and getting feedback from the stakeholders. The stakeholders and their willingness to become a part of the program, will be critical to a successful launch of a "green initiative" in our courts.

The Policy Subcommittee looked at the various statutes, rules and regulations that currently govern filing and storage of court documents in Cook County and in Illinois. The Subcommittee explored governing rules in other jurisdictions and recommended proposed

changes to existing law in Illinois to enable an electronic court services management system to be successful. Although the Subcommittee found that there is currently no explicit requirement to store court documents in hard copy, a clarification of this rule from the AOIC and governing bodies is recommended.

The Funding Subcommittee examined various ways of implementing the program financially, recognizing that ultimately there would be cost savings from an electronic court service management system. The Subcommittee identified the primary capital costs involved and explored various funding mechanisms that are currently in place or have been used in other jurisdictions such as convenience fees or bond issuances. The Subcommittee made recommendations specific to Cook County and focused on existing funds that may be available to implement a more comprehensive program.

The Task Force also examined sustainable "green office practices" that have been implemented in law offices and reviewed "green" initiatives in the Circuit Court Clerk's Office. Reports of these activities are also included in this final report. This report also contains a current status of the Circuit Court's electronic document management system and what is forecasted in the coming years.

Finally, the Task Force Report concludes with a series of recommendations on pages 63 to page 66 that encourages Cook County to continue additional electronic services from imaging documents, to e-warrants, to electronically entering pleas of guilty. The recommendations also cover specific proposals from each of the subcommittees. Overall, the Task Force recommendations encourage the expansion of e-filing and other electronic services in the Cook County courts and supports various "green initiatives" being undertaken in law offices and legal-related public offices in Cook County.

We hope the CBA Board of Managers will adopt these recommendations and forward them to the appropriate bodies for implementation.