

Glossary of Judicial Terms from Injustice Watch

Chancery Division: The term “chancery” describes lawsuits in which the plaintiff seeks to have the defendant perform or refrain from performing a specific action, rather than suing for monetary damages. This division hears injunctions, class-actions, mortgage foreclosures, declaratory judgments, contract matters, creditors’ rights, and more.

Child Protection Division of the Juvenile Court: Judges hear cases involving child abuse, child neglect, child dependency, private guardianship, termination of parental rights, and orders of protection related to child protection proceedings.

County Division: Judges hear cases involving adoption, elections, mental health proceedings, real estate taxes, municipal proceedings, and annexation of land to a tax body.

Criminal Division: Judges in the criminal division hear felony cases (cases that could result in a prison term of a year or more). The division also handles issues related to felony trials like record expungement and petitions for post-conviction relief. Criminal judges hearing Chicago cases sit at the Leighton Criminal Courthouse on Chicago’s Southwest Side. Others also hear felonies in the suburban courthouses.

Domestic Relations Division: Judges hear cases involving divorce (and related matters like legal separation or dissolving a civil union), allocation of parental responsibilities and parenting time, child support, third-party visitation, and parentage matters.

Domestic Violence Division: Judges hear matters involving order of protections, no contact orders, and certain criminal cases related to domestic violence.

Elder Law and Miscellaneous: This division includes certain matters involving individuals aged 60 and older, including issues such as elder abuse, domestic violence, and some criminal cases.

Juvenile Justice Division: Judges conduct trials for minors charged with violations of laws or ordinances, and proceedings for minors addicted to alcohol or drugs and for runaways.

Law Division: The law division hears lawsuits for monetary damages larger than \$30,000 in the city and larger than \$100,000 in the suburbs. Examples include personal injury, legal malpractice, property damage, employment security, and much more.

Pretrial Division: This division includes initial proceedings in criminal cases, such as bail hearings, preliminary hearings, and applications for search warrants. This division also oversees cases referred to deferred prosecution programs. This division was created in 2017 when Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans issued an order reforming bail.

Probate Division: Judges hear matters involving wills, estates, and guardianship of minors or those with disabilities.

Municipal Departments: The municipal department is divided into six geographical districts.

First Municipal District: This district covers the City of Chicago and handles felony preliminary hearings, misdemeanor cases (except domestic violence), housing, evictions, small claims, licenses, traffic, lawsuits with damages under \$30,000, marriages, and civil unions. Hearings take place at the Daley Center in downtown Chicago and at additional sites known as “branch courts” around the city.

Second through Sixth Municipal Districts: These suburban districts handle the types of cases heard by the First District, but also oversee felony criminal cases and juvenile justice cases in the district, law division tort cases

in the district, orders of protection, no contact orders, specialty courts for veterans, specialty courts for mental health and drug treatment (depending on the district), civil suits with damages under \$100,000, and name changes.

Second Municipal District (Skokie Courthouse): northern suburbs.

Third Municipal District (Rolling Meadows Courthouse): northwest suburbs.

Fourth Municipal District (Maywood Courthouse): western suburbs.

Fifth Municipal District (Bridgeview Courthouse): southwest suburbs.

Sixth Municipal District (Markham Courthouse): southern suburbs.

Other terms:

Administrative law judge: Lawyers hired to conduct hearings on municipal code violations. May also be called “hearing officers.”

Associate Judge: A judge elected by the circuit judges. Candidates send in applications, and finalists are chosen by a committee of the chief judge and presiding judges. Circuit judges then vote amongst the finalists. Associate judges make slightly less money than circuit judges and must be approved by the Supreme Court to hear felony cases, but otherwise have the same responsibilities. Circuit judges vote on whether to retain associate judges every four years.

Chief Judge: The chief judge is elected by the circuit court judges and is responsible for assigning all of the court’s judges and for overseeing administrative matters. The chief judge can issue orders for judges to follow—such as the new bail reform rules—and create new divisions and programs. Currently, the chief judge is Timothy C. Evans

Circuit Judge: A judge elected by the public. Cook County judicial elections take place every two years. Judges must run for retention every six years.

Office of the Cook County Public Defender: the office that represents criminal defendants who cannot afford an attorney. Attorneys in the office are known as assistant public defenders. The head of the office—known as the Cook County Public Defender, currently Amy Campanelli—is appointed by the Cook County Board.

Office of the Cook County State's Attorney: the office that prosecutes state crimes in the county, and also represents Cook County in lawsuits against it. Attorneys in the office are known as assistant state’s attorneys. The head of the office—known as the Cook County State’s Attorney, currently Kim Foxx—is elected by the public.

Presiding Judge: The Chief Judge of Cook County appoints a presiding judge to oversee each division and each municipal department. Presiding judges handle administrative matters in their divisions. In some divisions, presiding judges are responsible to assigning cases to judges (in other divisions, cases are assigned randomly by a computer).

Supervising Judge: A judge appointed to supervise a division within a section.