



Report of the 2012 Judicial Performance Commission of Cook County

September 2012



The 2012 Judicial Performance Commission of Cook County (JPC or Commission) has completed its evaluations of the Circuit Court and Appellate Court Judges whose terms expire this year.

Each judge's report consists of a professional biography (compiled from Sullivan's Judicial Profiles and questionnaires completed by the judges) and a narrative describing the strengths and weaknesses of the judge's performance on the bench as identified in our research. For judges with difficulties on the bench, the Commission's report includes a judicial performance improvement plan which recommends actions such as peer mentoring, court watching, anger management courses, and continuing education. For judges demonstrating substantial difficulties on the bench, the Commission's report includes a judicial performance improvement plan, and indicates that significant difficulties on the bench may impede his or her effectiveness as a jurist.

The reports issued by the JPC do not recommend or not recommend judges for retention. Rather, the JPC was established to conduct and utilize research-based judicial evaluations to provide constructive feedback about judicial performance to the judges being evaluated, their supervising judges, and the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County. The reports of the JPC are available to the legal community and to the public-at-large. The goal of the JPC is to use judicial evaluations as a tool in an effort to improve the quality of the Cook County judiciary and to identify those judges who are recognized as good jurists.

The JPC is based on the performance commission model of judicial evaluation in use in 18 states. The performance commission model is a means of evaluating sitting judges where the central question is: Does this judge possess the qualities which make a fine jurist, regardless of the case before the bench? Evaluations of a judge undertaken from this model focus on the objective qualities of judicial performance, attempting to remove considerations of any individual case outcome from assessing a judge's skill, clarity and professionalism in bringing a case to conclusion. The American Bar Association has issued Black Letter Guidelines for the Evaluation of Judicial Performance, which it revised in 2005. The revised Guidelines stress self-improvement in the judiciary, improved efficacy in assignment of judges and a higher quality of data available to persons responsible for retaining judges. Because the ABA guidelines envision a community-assessment, as well as a self-assessment, to promote excellence in the judiciary, the system it designs is not a disciplinary system. The JPC has the same goals. It also employs much of the recommended methodology: anonymity for respondents; behavior-based—not outcome-based—instruments for evaluating judicial performance; multiple sources of information to provide corroboration of data; and use of public records where available.

The JPC is comprised of 18 lawyers and nonlawyers who have donated their time and expertise to serve on the Commission, and its composition reflects the diversity of the community. Its evaluations are based upon research conducted by the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice. The Judicial Performance Commission is an independent body of Chicago-area professionals committed to improving the quality of Cook County's courts by combining objective data with constructive feedback. Commission members are drawn from various legal, educational and social institutions in Cook County. They serve as a board of directors, overseeing and governing the operations, but not influencing the research results.

The Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice provides an independent research team of paid staff, interns and volunteers to collect and present data to the Commission for use in evaluating the judges. Chicago Appleseed, with the cooperation of the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County and the Clerk of



the Circuit Court, developed a list of lawyers who have appeared before the judicial retention candidates within the preceding three years. This list also included Cook County Assistant State's Attorneys and Public Defenders who have been assigned to the courtrooms of the judges being evaluated. These lawyers received a web-based survey. Chicago Appleseed also conducted confidential interviews with a sampling of these attorneys, as well as interviews with supervising judges. Court-watching and research into local news media rounds out the data collection. Chicago Appleseed also conducted additional interviews with attorneys having extensive experience before the judges.

Telephone interviews are conducted by paid staff, following a structured script. Each interview asks the attorney to evaluate the judge's performance in six categories: Legal Ability, Courtroom Management, Diligence, Integrity, Temperament, and Fairness & Independence. Staff ask for an assessment of the judge's performance with regard to each area. With regard to legal ability, interviewees may be asked about knowledge of rules and procedure, about clarity and consistency in rulings and how the judge responds to novel or difficult issues. With regard to courtroom management, attorneys may be asked about whether the judge is on time and about calendaring and settlement procedures in the courtroom. To assess a judge's diligence, interviewers may question attorneys about whether rulings are issued without undue delay or how prepared for and engaged in hearing the judge seems.

With regard to integrity, attorneys may be interviewed about *ex parte* communications, the appearance of impropriety, and about recusal. With regard to temperament, attorneys may be asked not only how the judge treats attorneys in his or her courtroom, but how the judge treats his or her staff or pro se litigants. Attorneys may be asked whether the judge seems professional and what the general atmosphere of that judge's courtroom is. With regard to Fairness & Independence, attorneys are asked whether they feel the judge's courtroom presents a level playing field. We ask whether the judge seems to favor familiar attorneys, plaintiffs or defendants. We try to determine if attorneys believe a case before this judge was unfairly impacted by external factors.

Electronic surveys are divided into the same six categories. Respondents are presented with a series of statements related to the area of judicial competence (Legal Ability, Courtroom Management, Diligence, Integrity, Temperament, and Fairness & Independence) and asked whether they "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" with the statement. Respondents may also choose "Does not apply" or may indicate they are "Neutral" with regard to any statement. Respondents are given the opportunity to clarify any response in each section. The surveys are administered by a third-party software company and all responses are completely anonymous.

Responses from a minimum of 30 and as many as 80 phone interviews and surveys from Clerk data, plus additional interviews, per judge were collected. Chicago Appleseed staff prepared a summary for each judge and presented the research to the Commission members. From those reports, the Commissioners determined the content of each evaluation. Each judge received a draft version of his or her evaluation and was offered the opportunity to appeal the evaluation in person or in writing. After the appeals process, staff finalized the evaluations, and the reports on each judge were reviewed and approved by members of the JPC.

The report of the Commission is distributed to the judge being evaluated, Presiding Judges, other supervising judges, and the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County. The reports of the JPC are available to the legal community and to the public-at-large.



The JPC's work does not end with the release of these reports and meetings with the Circuit Court leadership, however. The JPC functions as citizen oversight to the court system, hoping to spur the judiciary toward self-improvement by identifying issues reported by attorneys practicing in their courtrooms. Any judge who received a performance improvement plan will be re-evaluated after three years. This fall, Chicago Appleseed plans to launch a comprehensive court-watching program to assist in data collection for the mid-term evaluations.

Public confidence in the judiciary is critical to the strength of our courts. The JPC hopes that objective research into the performance of sitting judges will both assist the judiciary in self-improvement and provide necessary public oversight for the courts.

Members of the 2012 Judicial Performance Commission

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MARTIN S. AGRAN
Chancery Division
Elected 1994

Biography

Martin S. Agran graduated from DePaul University College of Law. Prior to his appointment to the bench, he served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and was in private practice. He was also a panel attorney with the Federal Defender's Office for 14 years.

Judicial Background

Martin S. Agran was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1994 and elected to the bench the same year. Judge Agran was initially assigned to the First Municipal District, then to the Child Protection Division. He served in the Juvenile Justice Division and the Trial Section of the Law Division. Since 2004, Judge Agran has been in the Chancery Division.

Strengths

Attorneys surveyed and interviewed indicated Judge Agran is well-respected. He is seen as a "thoughtful" jurist who takes time to do his own research and come to the right conclusion. He has the ability to "move his cases" and he does this while still taking time to ensure everyone's cases are litigated thoroughly. Respondents noted his "judicial and cordial" demeanor and describe him as "very fair." He is known for giving "well-reasoned decisions based on the law." Consistently, interviewees stated that Judge Agran was "very knowledgeable" and "bright."

This judge was also consistently praised for courtroom management skills. While he "keeps his call moving" and is "very organized", Judge Agran is also said to be "very accommodating" and grants continuances when necessary. One interviewee pointed out that Judge Agran "always made sure everyone knew the status." The attorneys interviewed uniformly stated that he "reads everything", and is always "very prepared" for court proceedings. Many respondents also mentioned that he had an excellent memory and could often recall many details of the matters before him.

Judge Agran's temperament also received praise from the attorneys surveyed. Many of the interviewees stated that he was "not excitable" and "even keeled." A number of respondents also stated that while Judge Agran could be firm at times, he always remained "professional" and "respectful."

Judge Agran is also highly regarded for his integrity and fairness. Many of the attorneys interviewed stated that his integrity was "beyond reproach." Attorneys also uniformly felt they "got a fair shake" from Judge Agran. This was even said by attorneys who received unfavorable decisions from the judge. Many interviewees also made special note of Judge Agran's treatment of *pro se* litigants, stating that he always treated *pro se* litigants fairly and listened to their arguments. One attorney stated that "you're always on a level playing field in his courtroom whether or not you're represented by a lawyer."

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Agran's judicial performance.



Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Agran, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



PATRICIA BANKS

Law Division

Elected 1994

Biography

Patricia Banks graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School. She was in private practice for her entire career. Ms. Banks also served as a Trustee for the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in the Northern District of Illinois.

Judicial Background

Patricia Banks was elected to the bench in 1994. Judge Banks was initially assigned to the Domestic Relations Division and to the Law Division in 2001. She is presently Presiding Judge in the Elder Law and Miscellaneous Remedies Division.

Strengths

Judge Banks' temperament and demeanor appear to be an asset. She is considered both accommodating and engaging of attorneys in her courtroom.

Judge Banks is diligent in conducting research on issues in the cases before her. She has also worked hard in the last year to create the new Elder Law and Miscellaneous Remedies Division, which, among other things, hears cases formerly heard in the Probate Division. She is praised for her efforts to establish this new division.

Respondents believed Judge Banks' integrity is sound and that she displays no bias or favoritism.

Weaknesses

With regard to her prior assignment as a trial judge, some respondents expressed concern about the speed with which Judge Banks resolved cases, and many respondents commented that she could be better prepared. However, reports regarding her current assignment developing a new elder law division have been positive. She is considered to be hard-working and knowledgeable.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Banks, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



RONALD F. BARTKOWICZ

Law Division

Elected 1994

Biography

Ronald Bartkowicz graduated from Loyola University School of Law. He was an attorney for the Chicago Transit Authority prior to joining the bench.

Judicial Background

Ronald Bartkowicz was appointed in 1985 as an Associate Judge and appointed as a Circuit Court judge in 1997. He was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. Judge Bartkowicz presently sits in the Law Division, Individual Commercial Calendar Section. Previously, he was in the Law Division, jury trial section, and the First Municipal District trial section.

Strengths

Respondents indicated that Judge Bartkowicz has excellent courtroom management skills, with the praise extending to his courtroom staff. Generally, interviewees noted that it is a very busy courtroom with a crowded docket, but most noted that he is “punctual” and moves cases. Interviewees say that he is professional, attentive, and has always behaved appropriately even when his patience was clearly tested. Judge Bartkowicz appears particularly good at communicating displeasure while remaining calm and courteous.

His courtroom was consistently described as a “level playing field” with few exceptions. He is described as “effective” in his use of pretrial time. Nonetheless, a minority of respondents felt he could be more persuasive in encouraging settlements. He is considered hard-working and very diligent, with more than one respondent commenting on his long hours in a typical day.

Judge Bartkowicz is knowledgeable about substantive and procedural law on his cases. Overall, Judge Bartkowicz is well-respected as a diligent and capable judge.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Bartkowicz’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Bartkowicz, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



CAROLE KAMIN BELLOWS

Domestic Relations Division

Appointed 1986

Elected 1988

Biography

Carole Bellows graduated from Northwestern University School of Law. She spent the entirety of her career in private practice.

Judicial Background

Carole Bellows was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1986 and elected in 1988. She presently serves in the Domestic Relations Division.

Strengths

Respondents most often described Judge Bellows as patient and prepared. Her calm demeanor is considered an asset, and she is known for courtesy to *pro se* litigants. She is considered honest and knowledgeable in her area of law, sometimes doing independent research where necessary. Attorneys report that she appears to favor settlement over judicial ruling, which generally earns compliments from attorneys, but a minority of respondents find this frustrating. She is considered to be compassionate and considerate of litigants. She is praised for her pretrial memoranda and for her courtroom management.

Most respondents also agreed that her courtroom functions well. One interviewee praised her informal manner of resolving cases and another felt her willingness to accept agreed orders without a hearing helped move her call expeditiously. Most respondents described her as on time, prepared and attentive to proceedings.

Judge Bellows is considered to be a very good judge and is praised for her diligence, temperament, and knowledge of the law.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Bellows' judicial performance.

Conclusions

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Bellows, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MAURA SLATTERY BOYLE
Criminal Division
Elected 2000

Biography

Maura Slattery Boyle graduated from the John Marshall Law School. She spent six years as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and also worked at the City of Chicago's Department of Law.

Judicial Background

Maura Slattery Boyle was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. She was assigned to the First Municipal District until she was transferred to the Criminal Division in 2009.

Strengths

Attorneys praise Judge Boyle for her improved knowledge of the law, preparedness and diligence, integrity and fairness on the bench. Many practitioners noted that Judge Boyle "has progressed" as an attorney and judge over the last few years—she is good at recognizing issues, explaining her rulings, and has gotten up to speed on the case law. She received high marks for her preparedness and judicial diligence, with many interviewees noting that she is "always prepared" and "works hard." She is considered "cognizant of ethical issues" and "has a reputation of someone beyond reproach, and honorable." Attorneys on both sides of the aisle appear to think that she is fair.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Boyle's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Boyle, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



DANIEL PATRICK BRENNAN
Chancery Division, Mortgage/Mechanics Lien
Elected 2006

Biography

Daniel Patrick Brennan graduated from Loyola University School of Law. He was counsel to the Cook County Sheriff.

Judicial Background

Daniel Brennan was elected in to the Circuit Court in 2006. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal District and then to the Sixth Municipal District. He is presently assigned to the Mortgage Foreclosure/Mechanics Lien call in the Chancery Division.

Strengths

Judge Brennan has been on the mortgage foreclosure/mechanics lien call in Chancery for less than a year. Respondents were generally positive, giving particular praise to his handling of *pro se* litigants and the overall fairness of his courtroom. He is called fair, rational, thorough and calm. Attorneys report that Judge Brennan will often telegraph his inclination prior to argument, but does not cut off argument and appears to consider what is presented to him. He is described as not inclined to rush cases through his courtroom.

Overall, Judge Brennan received good ratings from the respondents. Most attorneys interviewed stated they believed he was diligent. One attorney mentioned that Judge Brennan always had notes on the cases before trial and that he “gives a preview that allows you to better manage your case.” Judge Brennan was also highly praised for his judicial temperament.

This judge was also praised for his fairness and integrity; his reputation among attorneys is excellent. Repeatedly, the interviewees stated they felt that they were always on a “level playing field” and that he “ruled on the matters before him.” He was consistently praised for his fairness and integrity and seen as a well-informed judge who has the ability to keep an even temper even when dealing with a high-volume courtroom.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Brennan’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Brennan, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



CYNTHIA BRIM
Fifth Municipal District
Elected 1994

Biography

Cynthia Brim graduated from Loyola University Law School. She was an Assistant Illinois Attorney General prior to becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Cynthia Brim was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994 and initially assigned to the First Municipal District. Judge Brim is presently assigned to the Fifth Municipal District but has been suspended from duty since March 12, 2012. Judge Brim was arrested on March 10, 2012 on misdemeanor charges related to an altercation with a Cook County Sheriff's Deputy at the Daley Center.

Strengths

It appears that Judge Brim is reasonably engaged in proceedings in her courtroom, and maintains control over her high volume courtroom. But there are indications that her sessions are unusually short and often adjourned early.

Weaknesses

More than half of respondents indicated a lack of confidence in her legal abilities. Even though the judge hears generally non-complex matters, her rulings are often described as unpredictable and delayed. Respondents indicate that they regularly file motions for substitution of judge, despite the cost and inconvenience to their clients.

Additionally, there are many complaints that Judge Brim is late to take the bench. Attorneys report repeated continuances because court starts late and because the call is handled inefficiently. Attorneys feel that Judge Brim is particularly rude and unaccommodating of counsel who are on call in multiple courtrooms. Many attorneys described her as "consistently late" and there is some concern that her case management delays resolution of cases.

Conclusion

Judge Brim is reported to be having significant difficulties in the areas of legal ability, diligence and temperament that seriously impede her effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

- Court-watching
- Peer Mentoring
- Anger Management Courses
- Continuing education courses on managing high-volume court calls
- Re-evaluation within three years



RODNEY BROOKS
Juvenile Division
Elected 1994

Biography

Rodney Brooks graduated from the Northwestern University School of Law. Prior to becoming a judge, he worked as a solo practitioner maintaining a diverse general practice.

Judicial Background

Rodney Brooks was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994 and assigned to the First Municipal District Traffic Center. In 1996, he was transferred to the Juvenile Justice Division where he is presently assigned as a floater or coverage judge.

Strengths

Judge Brooks received high marks from attorneys on both sides of the aisle. His legal ability and knowledge of the law is considered one of his most obvious strengths. Attorneys commented that he “reads statutes literally and follows them” to the letter of the law, that he is “extremely well versed in the law” and does research when he is uncertain about a particular issue. Judge Brooks garnered praise for his courtroom management, with respondents noting that he does a “great job moving through his cases” and the call is “very smooth” in his courtroom. Our research shows that he is prepared for court.

Judge Brooks received positive evaluations regarding his judicial integrity and temperament, with many experienced attorneys praising him for being “even tempered”, “respectful”, with everything done “by the book—no exceptions.” Many attorneys like the predictability of Judge Brook’s demeanor, and many praised his fairness and independence.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Brooks’ judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Brooks, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MARY MARGARET BROSNAHAN
Criminal Division
Elected 2000

Biography

Mary Margaret Brosnahan graduated from DePaul University College of Law. She was a career Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and was a Supervisor in the Felony Trial Division.

Judicial Background

Mary Margaret Brosnahan was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. Judge Brosnahan was initially assigned to traffic court and later served in the First Municipal District in central bond court, narcotics preliminary hearing court, and the homicide/sex preliminary hearing court. Since 2005, Judge Brosnahan has been assigned to the Criminal Division.

Strengths

Judge Brosnahan received consistently high marks in all areas surveyed. Interviewees described her as having "outstanding ability", saying it was always "clear she read the law and used logic to arrive at her decisions."

She was also highly praised for her courtroom management. Several respondents stated that Judge Brosnahan was "extremely well prepared", "prompt", and efficient. One respondent commented that she "always explained to the courtroom why private lawyers' cases were called first." While she keeps her call moving, Judge Brosnahan was also praised for her ability to allow "parties to complete what they need to do" and "give extra court dates when needed."

Respondents gave Judge Brosnahan high marks for diligence and attention to detail. She was frequently referred to as "extremely prepared" and "very well organized." One respondent stated that Judge Brosnahan "has a handle on all of the cases that come before her."

Overall, Judge Brosnahan received high marks from the respondents interviewed in all areas. She was consistently praised for her knowledge and application of the law and her courtroom management skills. She is also seen as a very diligent and well informed judge who has the ability to keep her call moving while giving appropriate attention to all matters before her. She is highly regarded by most attorneys and several stated they were "happy to go to her courtroom."

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Brosnahan's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Brosnahan, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JILL CERONE-MARISIE
First Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

Jill Cerone-Marisie graduated from the John Marshall Law School. She served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and was in private practice.

Judicial Background

Jill Cerone-Marisie was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. Judge Cerone-Marisie was initially assigned to the First Municipal Division, and transferred to the Third Municipal District in 2007.

Strengths

Judge Jill Cerone-Marisie received high marks in all categories. With regard to her legal ability, attorneys stated that she is "an excellent judge" with "a very knowledgeable grasp of the case law and the courtroom procedures." She is reported to know the law well and apply it correctly. She was also praised for her ability to move through her cases in an efficient manner despite having a heavy call. Judge Cerone-Marisie is described as "always on time" and respondents characterize her call as running smoothly and efficiently.

Attorneys on both sides of the aisle gave Judge Cerone-Marisie positive marks for her diligence, preparedness, integrity and temperament—attorneys were roundly impressed by her judicial tone, demeanor, and personable disposition: "she treats everyone the same" and is "authoritative, but not condescending." Finally, attorneys praised her fairness and independence.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Cerone-Marisie's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Cerone-Marisie, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



GLORIA CHEVERE
First Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

Gloria Chevere graduated from the John Marshall Law School. Prior to joining the bench, she was a partner in private practice. Ms. Chevere also worked for the Chicago Transit Authority and as a prosecutor and hearing officer for the Secretary of State, as well as a hearing officer for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

Judicial Background

Gloria Chevere was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. Judge Chevere was then assigned to the First Municipal District.

Media Summary

In May 2010, Fox Chicago News in conjunction with the Better Government Association, investigated whether Cook County Judges were leaving work early. The article mentioned Judge Chevere as a judge who often left the courthouse early. Judge Chevere was reassigned shortly after the story was made public.

Strengths

Judge Chevere generally received good scores from most attorneys for being able to “move her call.” One respondent stated that he had “seen hundreds in her courtroom” and that Judge Chevere was “still able to keep on top of things.” Many interviewees also believed they were treated fairly in her courtroom. Her legal ability is generally considered adequate for her call and attorneys believe she runs her courtroom efficiently.

Weaknesses

A significant number of respondents reported that Gloria Chevere can be “dismissive and rude” on the bench. Half of the respondents believe she has not read pleadings sufficiently before ruling. She has the reputation of unilaterally cancelling her 2:30 pm call, saying that it is not necessary. There were many negative comments about her performance as a judge, primarily related to temperament and diligence.

Several respondents believe the judge unnecessarily issues arrests warrants for defendants who are late to court, which wastes resources. About half of the respondents also complained that her rulings are erratic, which some attributed to her being too often unprepared.

Conclusion

Judge Chevere is reported to be having significant difficulties in the areas of diligence and temperament that seriously impede her effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

- Court-watching
- Peer Mentoring
- Re-evaluation within three years



MATTHEW COGHLAN
Criminal Division
Elected 2000

Biography

Matthew Coghlan graduated from the University of Illinois College of Law. He served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney.

Judicial Background

Matthew Coghlan was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. He was initially assigned to the Domestic Violence Court and Traffic Court. He is presently assigned to the Criminal Division, where he has been since 2006.

Strengths

Judge Coghlan is characterized by respondents as intelligent and many remarked that he has a strong foundational understanding of the law. Respondents report that his courtroom management is good, saying that the Judge is punctual and moves cases efficiently.

His temperament also drew particular praise from respondents. Judge Coghlan was called "compassionate" and noted for his professionalism. He is calm and fair, with most respondents believing his demeanor is a considerable asset.

Weaknesses

Some respondents —about one-fifth—commented that Judge Coghlan runs his courtroom on the state's attorney's schedule. The Commission believes the judge should carefully consider the impression that he favors the state in scheduling.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Coghlan, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MAUREEN E. CONNORS

Appellate Division

Elected to the Circuit Court 1994

Appointed to the Appellate Court 2010

Biography

Maureen Connors graduated from IIT/Chicago-Kent College of Law. She was in private practice before taking the bench. She also served as an Assistant General Attorney at the Chicago Park District.

Judicial Background

Maureen Connors was appointed to the Illinois Appellate Court in 2010. She became an Associate Judge in 1988 and was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. She served in the Traffic Division, Domestic Violence Division, and the Fifth Municipal District and the Probate Division of the Circuit Court before becoming an Appellate Judge.

Strengths

Judge Connors is considered an excellent judge, hardworking judge. She is reported to have very good legal ability, and is praised for her knowledge of the law. Attorneys report that she is “exemplary in terms of dealing with people” and “courteous and respectful to all equally.”

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Connors’ judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Connors, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



GRACE G. DICKLER
Domestic Relations Division
Appointed 1988
Elected 2006

Biography

Grace Dickler graduated from Northwestern University School of Law. She was a legal aid attorney and in private practice as a solo practitioner before becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Grace Dickler was appointed as an Associate Judge in 1988 and elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. She served in the Second Municipal District. In 2010, she became Presiding Judge in the Domestic Violence Division and transferred to the position of Presiding Judge of the Domestic Relations Division in 2011.

Strengths

Respondents were largely positive with regard to Judge Dickler. They describe her as decisive with good temperament. She is considered to be both a good judge and a good administrator. In her current role as the Presiding Judge of the Domestic Relations Division, she has assembled a series of task forces to advise her on reform efforts. Judge Dickler is considered to be an asset to the court system as a well-qualified and well-respected jurist and Presiding Judge.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Dickler's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Dickler, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



CHRISTOPHER DONNELLY
Sixth Municipal District
Elected 1994

Biography

Christopher Donnelly graduated from the John Marshall Law School. He spent one year in private practice before working as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney prior to becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Christopher Donnelly was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. He served in the Juvenile Justice Division prior to being transferred to the Sixth Municipal District in Markham, where he currently sits.

Strengths

Most attorneys agree that Judge Donnelly has the aptitude to understand the law and apply it. Attorneys reported that Judge Donnelly is smart and has "an excellent grasp of what's going on in his courtroom." Regarding his courtroom management, interviewees repeatedly praised his efficiency, describing him as running a tight ship and being capable of moving the call along. His judicial diligence and preparedness were not generally questioned.

Weaknesses

While many attorneys complimented his intelligence and legal aptitude, half of the respondents raised concerns about Judge Donnelly's temperament and his professionalism. More than one-third of respondents roundly criticized his tone and demeanor while on the bench. Some respondents referred to him as a "bully", stating that "he goes out of his way to demean people unnecessarily." He was also described as being "mean spirited" on the bench and many respondents described him as "unprofessional, rude and disrespectful." After summing up their concerns, some respondents expressed the hope that the evaluation process would inspire the Judge to consider the impression that his demeanor makes on the court system.

Many respondents also had negative responses about Judge Donnelly's judicial fairness, with more than half of the respondents reporting that he has a pro-prosecution perspective.

Conclusion

Judge Donnelly is reported to be having significant difficulties in the areas of temperament and judicial fairness that seriously impede his effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

Court-watching
Peer mentoring
Anger Management courses
Re-evaluation within three years



LORETTA EADIE-DANIELS
Sixth Municipal District
Elected 2000

Biography

Loretta Eadie-Daniels graduated from the DePaul University College of Law. She was an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and, before that, an attorney for the Chicago Transit Authority.

Judicial Background

Loretta Eadie-Daniels was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000 and was assigned to a misdemeanor call in the Sixth Municipal District. She remains in the Sixth District, but now handles traffic and ordinance violations.

Strengths

Attorneys report that Judge Eadie-Daniels takes her responsibility toward *pro se* litigants seriously, although some attorneys believe this slows down her call. She is praised for her calm temperament. Many lawyers report that she is doing a good job as a jurist in her current assignment.

Weaknesses

One-half of respondents reported that Judge Eadie-Daniels is having difficulties on the bench. She is often described as having problems with managing her court call. Some lawyers complain that she can appear frustrated with litigants, and sometimes does not communicate sufficiently the reasoning behind her rulings.

Conclusion

Judge Eadie-Daniels is reported to be having difficulties in the areas of courtroom management and issuing clearly articulated rulings that impede her effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

Court-watching
Peer Mentoring
Re-evaluation within three years



JAMES DANIEL EGAN

(Judge Egan has announced that he intends to retire from the bench in 2012)

Law Division

Appointed 1995

Elected 2000

Biography

James Egan graduated from John Marshall Law School. He was both an Assistant Cook County Public Defender and an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney before becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

James Egan was appointed as an associate judge in 1989 and became a Circuit Court judge in 1995. He was first elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal Traffic Court and subsequently transferred to the Second Municipal District Criminal Court and the Criminal Division. He currently hears a motion calendar in the Law Division.

Strengths

Respondents had a high opinion of Judge Egan's legal ability, his diligence and his fairness. Comments with regard to the Judge's diligence are good, calling him "prompt and alert", "very diligent", and "cordial, prompt and familiar with matters he must address." Likewise, he is described as "well versed in the law and . . . very fair in his application of the law."

Respondents also felt Judge Egan's courtroom management is excellent, noting that he never wastes time and maintains a courteous professional manner while moving cases through his courtroom. Attorneys seem comfortable in his courtroom, considering Judge Egan to be calm and even tempered.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Egan's judicial performance.

Conclusions

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Egan, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



KATHY M. FLANAGAN

Law Division

Elected 1988

Biography

Kathy Flanagan graduated from The John Marshall Law School. She was in private practice prior to joining the bench.

Judicial Background

Kathy Flanagan was elected to the Circuit Court in 1988. Judge Flanagan was initially assigned to the Domestic Relations Division as a trial judge. Judge Flanagan currently sits in the Law Division on a motion call.

Strengths

With regard to fairness and legal ability, Judge Flanagan is generally considered intelligent, with a good grasp of the law, and appropriate diligence. Respondents believe her to be very engaged in the courtroom, giving full attention to the details. With regard to rulings, she is described as “consistent, predictable and follows the law.” Many interviewees characterize her as “very fair” and “always prepared”, even those who had harsh comments about her temperament.

Some phone interviewees used superlative language in describing Judge Flanagan’s legal ability and all but one of them described her as very prepared for court, punctual and engaged in proceedings, including one who considered her to have a “very bad” temperament. Responses indicate that Judge Flanagan is clearly diligent and capable on the bench. She is prepared for court, punctual and engaged in the proceedings with a reputation for intelligence and general fairness, including with regard to *pro se* litigants.

Weaknesses

Nearly half of respondents had a negative impression of Judge Flanagan’s judicial temperament. She was called “hostile,” “imperious,” “rude,” and “discourteous.” She was frequently described as impatient or inflexible. A number of attorneys believe these qualities negatively affected her ability to manage her courtroom efficiently. However, even some respondents who were highly critical of her temper noted that she is “bright” and “truly cares” about the outcomes in her courtroom.

Responses show that Judge Flanagan displays inappropriate temper and has created a courtroom atmosphere that is readily described as hostile or unpleasant.

Conclusion

Judge Flanagan is reported to be having significant difficulties in the area of temperament that seriously impede her effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

Court-watching

Anger Management courses

Peer mentoring for guidance in appropriate judicial temperament.

Re-evaluation within three years



ELLEN L. FLANNIGAN
Domestic Violence Division
Elected 2006

Biography

Ellen L. Flannigan graduated from the Loyola University School of Law. Prior to joining the bench, she worked as an attorney in private practice.

Judicial Background

Ellen Flannigan was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. She is assigned to the Domestic Violence Division.

Strengths

Most respondents say that Judge Flannigan is performing adequately. She is reported to have a good grasp of the issues and is praised for putting specific findings on the record. Respondents believe she is generally fair, reaching sound decisions, based in law.

Weaknesses

About one-third of respondents have concerns that Judge Flannigan is not always well-prepared. Attorneys report she has not always read the case materials, but these lawyers add that she usually comes to the right decision. Some attorneys also say that Judge Flannigan can be insensitive when questioning victims of domestic violence.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns about one or more category relating to Judge Flannigan's judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

Court-watching

Re-evaluation within three years



PETER FLYNN
Chancery Division
Appointed 1999
Elected 2000

Biography

Peter Flynn graduated from Yale Law School. He was in private practice before becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Peter Flynn was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1999 and elected in 2000. Judge Flynn was initially assigned to the First Municipal District and then to the Law Division, Individual Commercial Calendar. He currently sits in the Chancery Division.

Strengths

Judge Flynn's intelligence and engagement with the issues before him are reported as obvious strengths by respondents. Many respondents remarked on how familiar with the cases on his docket the judge is, noting that he is prepared and runs an efficient, professional courtroom. Although respondents indicate that Judge Flynn expects similar rigor from the attorneys practicing in his courtroom, they note he does not lose his temper with unprepared attorneys, but he will pass their cases to another date.

Judge Flynn is considered very smart with an excellent legal ability. Several respondents characterized him as among the smartest or best judges in the county. He is described as having a thorough understanding of both law and procedure, as well as having control of his cases. Additionally, Judge Flynn is noted to be engaged and interested in the proceedings before him and possesses good communication skills.

"Calm" and "fair" are common assessments of his courtroom demeanor. His courtroom is regularly described as a "level playing field." It appears that attorneys know what to expect in Judge Flynn's courtroom and that *pro se* litigants are handled respectfully and fairly. Respondents believed that cases move through his docket expeditiously.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Flynn's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Flynn, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



RAYMOND FUNDERBURK

First Municipal District

Appointed 1993

Elected 1994

Biography

Raymond Funderburk graduated from the University of Illinois College of Law. Prior to joining the bench, he worked as an attorney for the Legal Assistance Foundation. He was also in private practice.

Judicial Background

Raymond Funderburk was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1993 and elected in 1994. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal District, Traffic Court and Domestic Violence Court. Currently, he is assigned to a jury call in the Civil Trial Section. In 2000, Judge Funderburk was appointed by the Illinois Supreme Court to a seat on the Illinois Court Commission's Disciplinary Panel.

Strengths

Judge Funderburk is seen as a very diligent judge. Many of the interviewees referred to him as "meticulous", "methodic", and "fully engaged." He is described as "deliberate" with good legal ability.

Judge Funderburk is also praised for his very high integrity and complete fairness. Consistently, interviewees stated that this judge's integrity was "unquestionable" and of the "highest degree." One attorney stated that he "couldn't imagine anyone with more integrity." Judge Funderburk's decisions are also seen as very fair and even handed. Most interviewees made note of feeling as if they were "always on a level playing field."

Weaknesses

While most respondents believe Judge Funderburk has a very strong grasp of courtroom procedure, many feel that this procedure often times gets in the way of efficiency. Attorneys say that the judge is overly concerned with protocol and appropriate dress and it can take attention away from the legal issues at hand.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Funderburk, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



CATHERINE HABERKORN
Second Municipal District
Elected 1994

Biography

Catherine Haberkorn graduated from the John Marshall Law School. She served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney, both in the criminal and civil divisions.

Judicial Background

Catherine Haberkorn was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. She was initially assigned to the Juvenile Division. She transferred to the criminal division and is presently assigned to a felony trial call.

Strengths

Respondents report that Judge Haberkorn displays a good legal ability and is fair and independent in the courtroom. Her integrity is noted by many and generally her courtroom functions well. Respondents say that Judge Haberkorn is well versed in the rules of procedure and applies them fairly and well. She is described as "honest" and fair, and respondents believe she puts effort into doing the right thing.

Weaknesses

Some respondents indicate Judge Haberkorn's temperament can be unpredictable. While most attorneys describe her as pleasant and professional, about one-quarter of respondents noted that she sometimes loses her temper.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns in one or more category relating to Judge Haberkorn's judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends:

Court-watching

Re-evaluation within three years



ORVILLE E. HAMBRIGHT, Jr.
First Municipal District
Appointed 2005
Elected 2006

Biography

Orville E. Hambricht, Jr. graduated from DePaul University College of Law. He was in private practice prior to becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Orville E. Hambricht, Jr. was appointed to the Circuit Court in 2005 and elected in 2006. He has been in the First Municipal District since election.

Strengths

Interviewees consistently stated that Judge Hambricht was a very diligent and thorough judge. Many attorneys mentioned that this judge “read everything”, was “very thoughtful”, and “engaged.” He is described as “genuinely interested in doing a good job.”

Judge Hambricht was also praised for his judicial temperament. Several respondents stated that he is very “patient”, a good listener, and “never flies off the handle.” He is praised for his ability to handle *pro se* litigants, with one respondent noting that Judge Hambricht’s temperament was “refreshing” especially when he is engaged with the high number of *pro se* litigants that go through his courtroom.

Respondents also stated that Judge Hambricht’s integrity and fairness were excellent. He is considered to be a very diligent and patient judge who takes time with each matter before him to ensure he is getting it right. He is also very highly praised for his judicial temperament. All the respondents felt that his integrity was beyond reproach and that Judge Hambricht was always fair and even handed.

Weaknesses

While Judge Hambricht received generally good remarks, respondents voiced concern about Judge Hambricht’s ability to manage his courtroom. Repeatedly, the interviewees stated that his call moved “painfully” and “unnecessarily” slowly. There was concern voiced about the length of time Judge Hambricht takes to make a decision and about the pace of his courtroom in general.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns in one or more category relating to Judge Hambricht’s judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends:

Court-watching
Peer mentoring
Re-evaluation within three years



PAMELA HILL-VEAL
First Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

Pamela Hill-Veal graduated from DePaul University College of Law. Before taking the bench, she was in private practice dealing mostly with domestic relations matters. She was also an administrative hearing officer with the Chicago Department of Administrative Hearings and a Civil Service Board member of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. She served as an assistant Cook County public defender and also worked as an Associate Professor at Chicago State University.

Judicial Background

Pamela Hill-Veal was appointed to the Cook county Circuit Court in 2004 and she was elected to the bench in November 2006. She was initially assigned to the First Municipal District Traffic Center and is now assigned to the Civil Trial Section.

Media Summary

In 2008, the Appellate Court reversed Judge Pamela Hill-Veal's contempt order against an attorney in her courtroom, *Petrakh v. Morano*, 385 Ill App 3d 855 (2008); 897 NE2d 316 (2008). The attorney had been jailed as a consequence of the contempt order. The court noted that Judge Hill-Veal misunderstood the status of the transfer of the case and that the attorney cited was acting in good faith on behalf of her client. Concurring with the reversal, Justice Cahill wrote a direct admonishment to Judge Hill-Veal.

The Commission is issuing a judicial performance improvement plan, but in light of this Appellate Court decision, the Commission wonders whether Judge Hill-Veal's judicial performance can be remedied by such a plan.

Strengths

Judge Hill-Veal is reported to have good legal ability. Most respondents consider her a "straight shooter" who displays no bias. There were no significant issues noted with diligence or preparedness.

Attorneys also praised Judge Hill-Veal's courtroom management, noting that she "moves quickly and efficiently," "gets to court early, handles a large call effectively," "is easy to deal with," and "moves lawyers out [of her courtroom] early." She is also praised for dealing well with a large number of *pro se* defendants, with some lawyers stating she is "very fair" to them.

Weaknesses

Judge Hill-Veal has a reputation for having an unpleasant demeanor or a very short temper. Respondents indicate that her reputation for bad temper is undermining her ability to function as reputable jurist. Respondents say that she often appears annoyed, rude and angry. She is described as quick to anger, stubborn and unwilling to reconsider her determinations. Many perceive these outbursts as unfairness or lack of familiarity with the case before her.



Conclusion

Judge Hill-Veal is reported to be having significant difficulties in the area of temperament that seriously impede her effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

- Court-watching
- Anger management courses
- Peer Mentoring
- Re-evaluation within three years



CAROL HOWARD
Criminal Division
Elected 1994

Biography

Carol Howard graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School. She worked as an Assistant Cook County Public Defender prior to joining the bench.

Judicial Background

Carol Howard was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. She was initially assigned to the First Municipal District and subsequently transferred to the Criminal Division.

Strengths

Respondents were uniformly complimentary of Judge Carol Howard's demeanor and professionalism. Fair, even-tempered, patient and pleasant were common descriptors. Her reputation among respondents is excellent.

Her handling of cases is called reasonable and several attorneys noted her practical, real world approach to the lower level offenses before her. Several respondents praised her grasp of procedure and noted her preparedness for court.

Judge Howard is considered to be a solid judge with good legal ability. Both prosecutors and defense counsel call her fair, with a low-key temperament. She is praised for reading all the pleadings and for being prepared.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Howard's judicial performance.

Conclusions

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Carol Howard, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



GARRITT E. HOWARD
Second Municipal District
Appointed 1994
Elected 1994

Biography

Garritt E. Howard graduated from IIT/Chicago-Kent College of Law. Prior to joining the bench, he served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney.

Judicial Background

Garritt E. Howard was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1994 and elected the same year. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal District. He transferred to the Second Municipal District in 1997, where he continues to serve.

Strengths

Judge Howard received consistently high marks in most areas. Several respondents noted that he knew the law, that he was very "consistent", and he was "able to articulate his decisions clearly." There were also a few interviewees that mentioned that they respected the judge's decisions even when he ruled against them. He was consistently praised for his knowledge and application of the law and his courtroom management skills. He is also seen as a very diligent and well-informed judge who has the ability to keep his call moving while giving appropriate attention to all matters before him.

Interviewees stated that Judge Howard "moved the call along." A few attorneys noted that he made good use of pretrial conferences in order to resolve issues and, in many instances, avoid a trial altogether. Nonetheless, respondents note he was "was very fair about giving continuances" and never rushes through matters that warranted more attention.

Interviewees also felt that Judge Howard was highly diligent. Many commented that he was "always prepared" for court and that "he read everything." A few respondents mentioned that Judge Howard had an excellent memory and could recall very detailed facts of a case.

Judge Howard received exceptional praise for his judicial temperament. Many interviewees stated that he "never seemed to get upset" and that he was "very even-keeled." This sentiment is echoed by other attorneys who stated that Judge Howard "treats everyone as they should be treated" and has a "perfect temperament."

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Howard's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Garritt Howard, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MICHAEL HOWLETT, Jr.
Criminal Division
Appointed 2005
Elected 2006

Biography

Michael Howlett graduated from Notre Dame University Law School. He clerked in the Federal District Court in Chicago and in the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. He worked for the U.S. Attorney's Office before entering private practice. He also served as counsel to Cook County State's Attorney Richard Devine.

Judicial Background

Michael Howlett served as an Associate Judge from 1983-86 and was appointed to the Circuit Court in 2005. He was elected bench in 2006, spending two years in the Juvenile Justice Division before moving into the Criminal Division. He currently sits in the Second Municipal District, hearing felony cases from the Criminal Division of the Circuit Court.

Strengths

Attorneys praised Judge Howlett in all categories, including his legal ability, courtroom management skills, preparedness and diligence, integrity, temperament, and fairness. He is "up to speed" on his cases and "isn't afraid to ask questions." He is also reported to "listen and stay focused" and remain engaged in the proceedings. Judge Howlett is said to "mak[e] sure everyone understands what's going on" in his courtroom. Judge Howlett is reported to be hard-working and focused on the cases in front of him: he "cares about people and doing a good job." Respondents noted that he is well-prepared for his call and well-versed in the law, rules and procedure.

Attorneys roundly praised his tone, judicial demeanor, diligence and integrity. Many attorneys focused on his integrity, temperament and fairness, giving him high marks in these areas. Respondents feel he has a good tone and demeanor while on the bench. Judge Howlett is described as "courteous and respectful" and lawyers repeatedly echoed the sentiment that "both sides get a fair shake" in front of him. He was uniformly praised for his fairness and judicial independence.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Howlett's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Howlett, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MOSHE JACOBIOUS
Chancery, Presiding Judge
Appointed 1991
Elected 2000

Biography

Moshe Jacobious graduated from DePaul University College of Law. He served as an Assistant Illinois Attorney General for his entire career.

Judicial Background

Moshe Jacobious was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1991 and was elected in 2000. He was first assigned to the Domestic Relations Division and then to the Chancery Division. In 2000, he was made Presiding Judge of the Domestic Relations Division, and presently serves as Presiding Judge of the Chancery Division.

Strengths

Respondents report that Judge Jacobious knows the law and works hard. He is considered diligent by the vast majority of respondents. His courtroom is described as efficient and fair. Judge Jacobious is characterized as generally prepared for court with a good memory for his cases. He is called dignified and professional.

As presiding judge, Judge Jacobious handles the administration of the Chancery Division and hears motions and cases assigned to him. Respondents were complimentary and frequently remarked upon his honesty, integrity and knowledge of rules.

Judge Jacobious is highly regarded by attorneys and judges in both Domestic Relations and Chancery divisions. He is praised as a supervisor and as a mentor.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Jacobious' judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Jacobious, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



PAUL KARKULA
County Division
Elected 2000

Biography

Paul Karkula graduated from the Valparaiso University School of Law. He served as an Assistant Cook County Public Defender and as Corporation Counsel to the Town of Cicero. He was in private practice immediately before joining the bench.

Judicial Background

Paul Karkula was elected in 2000. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal District Traffic Center and subsequently transferred to the Chancery Division for the foreclosure call. Judge Karkula is presently assigned to the County Division.

Strengths

Judge Karkula is considered fair and extremely diligent. Attorneys report that he remains even-tempered, even when there are contentious parties before him and also when his call is heavy. Respondents described the judge as very well organized, well prepared for court, and reliable. He is called fair to all parties. He handles a sometimes emotional call with what is characterized as both good legal skill and temperament.

Much of his call is routine uncontested matters—such as name changes—but he is described as “quiet, efficient, and considerate in these proceedings.” Attorneys with experience before him in Chancery or on more complicated matters in County feel he has a good legal ability and an extensive knowledge of the property tax code.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Karkula’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Karkula, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JOSEPH KAZMIERSKI

Criminal Division

Appointed 1994

Elected 1994

Biography

Joseph Kazmierski graduated from IIT/Chicago-Kent College of Law. He served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney throughout his legal career and served as a supervisor in the Third Municipal District.

Judicial Background

Joseph Kazmierski was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1994 and then elected the same year. He is currently assigned to the Criminal Division where he is a supervising judge.

Strengths

Judge Kazmierski is generally considered to have very good legal ability, with most respondents reporting that he has a strong knowledge and understanding of the law. He is reported to "have case law at his fingertips" and he is described as an "excellent jurist", "a credit to the judiciary", and at "the top of the legal community." Respondents say he has good courtroom management skills and runs an efficient, "very respectable" court call by all accounts.

He is described as prepared, organized, and willing to do his own research; he issues written opinions and is prompt in his rulings. He reportedly makes a good record and meticulously reviews pleadings. Judge Kazmierski drew praise for his work ethic, and judicial demeanor. Many survey respondents said he is fair and immune from external influences on his decision making. Overall, respondents feel he is an asset to the bench and a model jurist.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Kazmierski's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Kazmierski, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



ROBERT LOPEZ CEPERO
Law Division, Motions Section
Appointed 1994
Elected 1994

Biography

Robert Lopez Cepero graduated from the University of Michigan Law School. Prior to joining the bench, he worked as a solo practitioner.

Judicial Background

Robert Lopez Cepero was appointed to the Cook County Circuit Court in 1994 and elected the same year. He was previously assigned to the First Municipal District, and to both Misdemeanor and Felony Preliminary Hearing Courts. Judge Lopez Cepero currently sits in the Law Division.

Strengths

Judge Lopez Cepero received generally good ratings from the respondents. Most attorneys interviewed believed he had strong legal ability and praised the Judge for giving clear explanations of his rulings.

Judge Lopez Cepero also received high marks for his diligence and his fairness. One attorney stated that diligence was “one of [Judge Lopez Cepero’s] best things.” Several interviewees also mentioned that this judge always “listened to both sides” and “gave everyone a fair shake.”

Attorneys generally find the judge to be knowledgeable and able to come to the right decision. His decisions are viewed as thoughtful and practitioners believe that Judge Lopez Cepero gives them adequate time to make their cases. He is also seen as very even-handed, showing no bias. Most respondents report that he is a solid jurist.

Weaknesses

About one-third of respondents believe that Judge Lopez Cepero is not always in sufficient command of the courtroom and can be short-tempered.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns in one or more category relating to Judge Lopez Cepero’s judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends:

Court-watching
Re-evaluation within three years



STUART LUBIN
Juvenile Division
Appointed 1991
Elected 1994

Biography

Stuart Lubin graduated from the University of Illinois Law School. He was an Assistant Cook County Public Defender throughout his career.

Judicial Background

Stuart Lubin was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1991 and elected in 1994. He currently serves in the Juvenile Justice Division.

Strengths

Judge Lubin is regarded as a smart and efficient jurist. His courtroom management praised as exceptional. Respondents characterize him as being exceptionally diligent and with unquestioned integrity. He is also praised for his fairness and for being decisive and patient on the bench.

Respondents characterize Judge Lubin as a model judge and consider him an asset to the judiciary. The Commission believes Judge Lubin is a good candidate to serve as a peer mentor.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no significant weaknesses in Judge Lubin’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Lubin, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MARVIN LUCKMAN
First Municipal District
Appointed 1992
Elected 2000

Biography

Marvin Luckman graduated from IIT/Chicago-Kent College of Law. Immediately prior to becoming a judge he worked as a Managing Attorney of the Criminal Traffic Division of the Chicago Transit Authority's Law Department.

Judicial Background

Marvin Luckman was appointed in 1992 and elected in 2000. He is assigned to the First Municipal District.

Strengths

Attorneys respect Judge Luckman and seem to enjoy practicing in front of him. He is considered to have excellent legal ability. His courtroom management is described as "on time" and "no nonsense." Respondents were very positive regarding his diligence, integrity and fairness, and were strongly supportive of him. Respondents had a generally favorable impression of his temperament and courtroom demeanor.

The Commission believes that Judge Luckman would make an excellent peer mentor for judges with regard to temperament in a high-volume courtroom.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Luckman's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Luckman, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MARCIA MARAS

Law Division

Appointed 1999

Elected 2000

Biography

Marcia Maras graduated from DePaul University College of Law. Prior to joining the bench, she was in private practice. Additionally, she served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and General Counsel to the Cook County Assessor.

Judicial Background

Marcia Maras was appointed in 1999 and elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. She was initially assigned to the First Municipal District before transfer to the County Division. She currently sits in the Law Division.

Strengths

In general, Judge Maras is considered to be a very good jurist with strong legal ability and temperament. Attorneys surveyed indicated that she understands the issues and rules decisively. Several mentioned that the judge is prompt and keeps good notes on her cases.

Judge Maras received praise for her courtroom management skills in particular, with one respondent noting "Judge Maras runs an efficient call, but, as is often not the norm, takes time to allow counsel to speak, and make a record if need be." Another respondent related an anecdote complimenting how Judge Maras dealt with an unprepared or possibly incompetent attorney, noting she was firm, but professional.

She is considered knowledgeable and up-to-date on black letter law. Judge Maras is characterized as a fair and competent jurist who runs her courtroom in a firm, efficient and attentive manner. Judge Maras handles a hectic call of both routine case management and substantive matters with what is described as professionalism and decorum. Respondents note she is careful to identify and address relevant issues and is fair.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Maras' judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Maras, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JAMES McGING
First Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

James McGing graduated from DePaul University College of Law. He was in private practice before becoming a judge. He was also an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and legal counsel to the Sheriff of Cook County.

Judicial Background

James McGing was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. He was initially assigned to Traffic Court in the First Municipal District, but has been transferred to Housing Court.

Strengths

Judge McGing is reported to have good legal ability. He issues written opinions, and respondents describe the opinions as well-considered and readable. Comments from all sources characterize the judge as well-prepared and efficient in a high-volume courtroom. Most respondents, as well as our court watchers, noted that Judge McGing keeps notes on his cases and stays on top of the call, balancing the need to move quickly against the demands of fairness.

Comments from all sources praised him as calm and even-tempered, in a hectic courtroom. Several respondents felt the judge displayed an appropriate consideration of *pro se* litigants. Attorneys indicate that Judge McGing does his work diligently, with an even temper and patience, managing a heavy call with civility and efficiency.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge McGing's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge McGing, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MICHAEL McHALE
Criminal Division
Elected 2006

Biography

Michael McHale graduated from DePaul University College of Law. He served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney throughout his career.

Judicial Background

Michael McHale was elected in 2006. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal District and transferred to the Domestic Violence Division in 2007. He is presently assigned to the Criminal Division as a floater judge, working on the Presiding Judge's call, handling motions, hearings, expungements, trials on the sexually violent persons call, and other matters.

Strengths

Judge McHale is often described as having a "full, comprehensive" legal knowledge and well-prepared for court. Some interviewees noted both that the judge has a solid understanding of the law and that he is constantly improving. He is known to pass cases and do appropriate research the same day in order to understand issues and move cases efficiently. Respondents state he has a calm, respectful demeanor, but remains "quick and effective" at managing his call. Judge McHale is characterized as respectful of attorneys, defendants and court staff.

He is considered "fair" and "honest." Judge McHale handles many *pro se* cases on the expungement call and several interviewees noted his patience with the call and his ability to manage the hearings well. Judge McHale is considered to have an outstanding temperament, remarkable patience and an excellent work ethic.

Weaknesses

Our investigation did not reveal any substantial weaknesses in Judge McHale's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge McHale, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JOYCE MARIE MURPHY GORMAN
First Municipal District
Elected 2000

Biography

Joyce M. Murphy Gorman graduated from the John Marshall Law School. She worked with the Office of the Presiding Judge of the Sixth Municipal District in Markham and as a solo practitioner before being elected to the bench.

Judicial Background

Joyce M. Murphy Gorman was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. She was initially assigned to the First Municipal District's Traffic Court. In 2002, Judge Murphy Gorman was assigned to the Civil Trial Section, non-jury call where she presently presides.

Strengths

Judge Murphy Gorman was described by most respondents as knowledgeable about the law. Attorneys say she takes the time to understand the issues and respondents reported that she keeps current on developments in the law relevant to the cases heard in her courtroom. There were several respondents who praised her for using her courtroom mediators effectively. The judge is described as punctual and prepared for court and she issues her rulings in a prompt, timely manner. She is considered fair and independent.

Judge Murphy Gorman's courtroom management skills were given generally favorable marks. Several interviewees stated that she always started her call on time and did not "dilly dally." Others mentioned how she worked to accommodate attorneys with multiple cases in order to keep the call moving.

Many interviewees stated that Judge Murphy Gorman was diligent. Most attorneys believed she was "always engaged" and "interested in doing a good job." She also "allowed each side to make their case." Judge Murphy Gorman was also repeatedly praised for her handling of *pro se* litigants. Respondents said that she explains things particularly well to *pro se* litigants "while remaining even-handed."

Weaknesses

About a quarter of respondents believed that Judge Murphy Gorman needs to improve her judicial temperament. Comments included: "could be calmer"; "she can be short with people"; "she lets lawyers get under her skin"; "she is short and testy with people in her courtroom." Court watchers noted that on a few occasions, she could get visibly frustrated but in general she demonstrated a good temperament.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns in one or more category relating to Judge Gorman Murphy's judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends:

Court-watching
Re-evaluation in three years



JAMES PATRICK MURPHY
Domestic Violence Division
Elected 2006

Biography

James Patrick Murphy graduated from IIT/Chicago-Kent College of Law. Prior to joining the bench, he served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney.

Judicial Background

James Patrick Murphy was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. He is assigned to the First Municipal District, Domestic Violence Division.

Strengths

Judge Murphy received consistently high marks in all areas surveyed. Respondents believe that he knows the law and that his opinions are well-reasoned and "expressed cogently." He is also seen as very diligent. Respondents stated that he "always reads the pleadings prior to oral arguments", and "listens to both sides."

He was also highly praised for his courtroom management. Several of the interviewees stated that Judge Murphy "kept the call moving." Repeatedly, the respondents stated that this judge was always "very respectful" of everyone who appeared before him. He is viewed as "professional" and "patient." Judge Murphy is also viewed as a very fair judge whose integrity is beyond reproach. Several interviewees especially mentioned how well this judge handles *pro se* litigants. He is said to treat them respectfully and fairly.

Judge Murphy is described as smart and respectful in the courtroom. He is reported to have good leadership skills and presently serves as a mentor to other judges. The Commission believes Judge Murphy is well-suited to mentoring other judges.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge James Murphy's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge James Murphy, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



THOMAS W. MURPHY
Fifth Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

Thomas W. Murphy graduated from John Marshall Law School. He was in private practice and a City of Chicago Alderman before becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Thomas W. Murphy was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. He was first assigned to the First Municipal Division, and transferred to the Fifth Municipal District in 2008.

Strengths

Judge Murphy is praised for his professional temperament. He “knows how to get things done” and is prepared. He is considered “one of the good ones” and “right down the middle” with regard to fairness. Respondents generally describe Judge Murphy as “an even-handed well-respected judge who is on top of his game in running his courtroom.” Judge Murphy appears to have earned the respect of the attorneys surveyed.

Several respondents noted that Judge Murphy is adept at handling *pro se* litigants and at handling conflicts in his courtroom. He is described as efficient and willing to put in the work necessary to do the job well.

Weaknesses

Our investigation did not reveal any meaningful weaknesses in Judge Thomas Murphy’s performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Thomas Murphy, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



MARYA NEGA
Domestic Relations Division
Elected 1994

Biography

Marya Nega graduated from Loyola University School of Law. She was the Principal Assistant Attorney with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

Judicial Background

Marya Nega was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. She was initially assigned to the First Municipal District. In 1995, Judge Nega was assigned to the Domestic Relations Division where she is currently a preliminary hearing judge.

Strengths

Respondents describe Judge Nega's legal ability as excellent, with many interviewees stating that she has a very "in-depth knowledge" of the statutes in Domestic Relations. Several respondents also remarked very favorably regarding Judge Nega's "common sense approach" to applying the law. She is known to describe her rulings logically.

The interviewees also believed she does an excellent job managing her courtroom. Several mentioned that Judge Nega always started on time and had a system in place to ensure that all cases were heard in a timely manner. Judge Nega was also repeatedly praised for her diligence and attention to detail. Many respondents stated that she always reads everything prior to the hearing, and that she is "always fully engaged." Some attorneys remarked that Judge Nega was also very organized.

Judge Nega's temperament received particularly high praise from almost all of the respondents. Several discussed at length the difficulty and the intensity of emotion in Domestic Relations. Judge Nega was repeatedly referred to as "patient" and "courteous."

One of her greatest strengths was her integrity and fairness. Consistently, respondents remarked that Judge Nega had, "the highest integrity" and that she "never plays favorites." Many respondents also stated that they always felt they were treated fairly in her courtroom and that that even when they lost in front of Judge Nega, they felt their side was always heard. Judge Nega's handling of *pro se* litigants is described as "respectful" and "artful." She is said to have a way of explaining court proceedings to *pro se* litigants without giving them legal advice.

The Commission recommends that Judge Nega be considered to be a mentor for new judges or judges who do not exhibit the appropriate patience and empathy that is desired in the courtroom.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Nega's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Nega, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



P. SCOTT NEVILLE

Appellate Court

Appointed 1999

Elected 2000

Appointed to Appellate Court 2004

Won the Democratic Primary Election for the Appellate Court 2012

Biography

P. Scott Neville graduated from the Washington University School of Law. He was an Administrative Law Judge with the Illinois Department of Income Security and worked with the Chicago Transit Authority. Mr. Neville was also in private practice prior to becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

P. Scott Neville was appointed as a Circuit Court judge in 1999. He served in Traffic Court, the First Municipal District and Housing Court before being appointed to the Appellate Court in 2004. He won the Democratic Primary election for the Appellate Court in March 2012 and will be unopposed in the November 2012 general election.

Strengths

Judge Neville is regarded as an experienced and intelligent jurist. Before joining the Appellate Court, he had a reputation for being impartial and sensitive to issues of bias. He is considered diligent and hard-working. He is engaged in arguments before the court and prepared with questions for counsel.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Neville's performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Neville, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JOAN MARGARET O'BRIEN
Fifth Municipal District
Elected 2000

Biography

Joan Margaret O'Brien graduated from the Drake University Law School. She was a career prosecutor with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

Judicial Background

Joan Margaret O'Brien was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. She was initially assigned to the Child Protection Division and presently serves in the Fifth Municipal District.

Strengths

Respondents describe Judge O'Brien as having a good demeanor and better than average courtroom management skills. She is said to comport herself well and keep her courtroom on schedule and in order. Attorneys report that Judge O'Brien is prepared for court and, for the most part, had no complaints about her overall legal ability. She is called "pleasant and knowledgeable."

More than one interviewee felt that Judge O'Brien takes care to explain her decisions. Most respondents say she is a solid judge with good temperament and ability to move her call efficiently.

Weaknesses

Judge O'Brien is generally considered to be a good judge, but has a reputation among some lawyers as being inappropriately state-oriented. About one in four respondents believe that defendants are at a disadvantage in her courtroom. According to these respondents, she is considered overly harsh in her sentencing and more accommodating to prosecutors' motions than defense motions. Judge O'Brien's professional demeanor and courtroom management are excellent, but there are concerns about her ability to set aside her experience as a state's attorney and rule for the defense where appropriate.

The Commission believes the judge should carefully consider how the perception of prosecutorial sympathy and her reputation for favoring the state affect her judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Joan O'Brien, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



PATRICK O'BRIEN
First Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

Patrick W. O'Brien served both as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney and as an Assistant Illinois Attorney General. Patrick O'Brien was in private practice and served as Hearing Officer for the Mayor's Licensing Commission immediately prior to election.

Judicial Background

Patrick W. O'Brien was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006 and has been assigned to the First Municipal District.

Other Research Summary

Patrick O'Brien was the lead prosecutor in a case that led to an exoneration lawsuit, *Ollins, et. al v. O'Brien et al*, Case No. 03 C 5795, filed in the Northern District federal court. The case was dismissed as to Judge O'Brien in March 2005 (2005 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7225).

The plaintiffs in the exoneration lawsuit were freed from prison in 2002, after being pardoned by then Governor George Ryan, and subsequently filed a civil rights action against the lab technician and the prosecutors involved in their criminal case. The exoneration suit alleged malicious prosecution, false imprisonment, and conspiracy, but was ultimately dismissed against all parties.

The Judicial Performance Commission concludes that this situation does not affect Judge O'Brien's qualifications to be a judge.

Strengths

Respondents considered Judge O'Brien "knowledgeable" and described his legal ability as "terrific", "satisfactory" and "competent". He is described as "courteous", "in control" and "efficient".

Judge O'Brien has what is characterized as a mild, low-key manner that is both professional and respectful. He is reported to be appropriately solicitous of *pro se* litigants. Respondents generally felt the courtroom was a level playing field where everyone is treated the same.

Respondents say that Judge O'Brien is well prepared for court and that he seems to have read filings and analyzed the issues prior to hearing. He is described as "methodical and gets to the point." Respondents say that he displays good ability to control the courtroom in high volume calls. He is especially praised for his ability to communicate with *pro se* litigants and to adequately advise them of their rights.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge O'Brien's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Patrick O'Brien, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



RAMON OCASIO, III
First Municipal District/Bond Court
Elected 2006

Biography

Ramon Ocasio III graduated from Northeastern University School of Law. Prior to joining the bench, he served as an Assistant Cook County Public Defender and Supervisor in that Office. He also worked in the Illinois Attorney General's Regional Consumer Fraud Office in Chicago.

Judicial Background

Ramon Ocasio III was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006 and assigned to the First Municipal District, where he currently sits.

Strengths

The majority of responses indicate that Judge Ocasio has a good grasp of the applicable law with some noting that limited knowledge is required for his current call: bond court rotation.

Judge Ocasio is viewed by a number of respondents as having a strong legal ability and as very diligent. Many interviewees mentioned that this judge did his own research and pulled his own cases. One attorney stated that he was before Judge Ocasio on his first day on the bench and that "he's clearly learned a lot" and that "he's consistently improved." Many of the defense attorneys also stated that this judge "took time with every person who appeared before him", in order to make the best possible decision in regards to their bond.

Many respondents also believed Judge Ocasio had high integrity and that he was very fair. They often stated that he was "very professional" and never does anything improper. Many of the attorneys interviewed stated that this judge treats all of the defendants equally and does not show bias. Judge Ocasio is reported to speak in Spanish to some defendants where appropriate to make sure that they understand everything. He is praised for judicial temperament, which is characterized as very low-key but effective.

Weaknesses

There seems to be a conflict in respondents' assessment of Judge Ocasio, particularly because many prosecutors believe defendants are at an advantage in Judge Ocasio's courtroom. Some said that he improperly sets cash bonds in burglaries and other nondrug felony cases too low without articulating an appropriate reason for doing so. Defense counsel, however, report that bonds are set correctly and that the judge makes sure the defendants understand their rights and the proceedings.

The Commission believes the judge should carefully consider how the perception among prosecutors that he favors defendants affects his judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Ocasio, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



STUART PALMER

Appellate Division

Appointed 1994

Elected 1994

Appointed to the Appellate Court 2012

Biography

Stuart Palmer graduated from Northwestern University Law School. He served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney.

Judicial Background

Stuart Palmer was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. He was assigned to the Criminal Division until 2005 when he transferred to the Chancery Division. Justice Palmer was assigned to the Appellate Court of Illinois by the Illinois Supreme Court effective January 6, 2012.

Strengths

Most respondents felt Judge Palmer had a strong legal ability. He "makes firm decisions and knows the law" and "he processes [information] quickly and comes to sensible decisions."

He is considered courteous. Many remarked that he controls his docket and treats everyone equally and with dignity. "A solid and fair jurist." Judge Palmer was very recently elevated to the Appellate Court. His performance as a Circuit Court judge indicates a strong legal ability and a judicial temperament appropriate to the position.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no significant weaknesses in Judge Palmer's performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Palmer, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



LEE PRESTON

**Law Division, Individual Commercial Calendar Supervising Judge
Elected 1994**

Biography

Lee Preston graduated from DePaul University College of Law. He worked as legislative counsel and served in the Illinois House of Representatives. Mr. Preston has also been a lecturer and adjunct professor of law.

Judicial Background

Lee Preston was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. He was assigned to the Child Protection Division until 1997, when he was transferred to the Law Division. He has remained in the Law Division and became a Supervising Judge in 2005.

Strengths

Respondents were generally positive with regard to their experiences practicing before Judge Preston. Judge Preston is often characterized as “smart” with a strong grasp of the law. He is characterized as analytic, courteous and professional.

Judge Preston is considered fair and impartial. Judge Preston brings years of experience to the bench and is generally well-regarded as a smart and capable jurist

Weaknesses

A significant number of respondents raised concerns about the speed with which cases move through Judge Preston’s courtroom and his diligence in managing the cases before him. These respondents complain that he is not only slow to rule, but also sets unnecessarily long briefing schedules. Attorneys report unusually long gaps between status hearings.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns in one or more category relating to Judge Preston’s judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends:

Re-evaluation within three years



MARY COLLEEN ROBERTS

Criminal Division

Elected 2006

Biography

Mary Colleen Roberts graduated from DePaul University College of Law. She was a social worker and then served as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney. She has also served as a hearing officer for the Cook County Circuit Court and an Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Chicago in the Law Department.

Judicial Background

Mary Colleen Roberts was elected to the Circuit Court in 2006. She has served in the Municipal and Juvenile Divisions and is presently sitting in the Criminal Division.

Strengths

Judge Mary Colleen Roberts received praise for all aspects of her judicial performance. She is described as "smart" and "hard working", a judge who tries to do the right thing. She is characterized as "even keeled", "professional" and "pleasant." Her court call is considered well-managed.

Judge Roberts is well-respected both as a practitioner before becoming a judge and as a jurist—particularly in the Juvenile Justice Division. She is considered to have good legal ability and temperament.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no significant weaknesses in Judge Roberts' judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Roberts, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



THOMAS DAVID ROTI
Third Municipal District, Civil Jury
Elected 2000

Biography

Thomas David Roti graduated from Loyola University School of Law. He was in private practice and General Counsel prior to becoming a judge.

Judicial Background

Thomas Roti was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000. He has been assigned to the Third Municipal District since taking the bench and currently hears Municipal and Law Division trials—both jury and bench—and supervises the Mandatory Arbitration Program in the Third District.

Strengths

Respondents were uniformly positive with regard to their experiences practicing before Judge Roti. Respondents described him as knowledgeable, a “quality judge” and one noted that “what he does not know, he researches.” He is said to use proffered briefs on legal issues effectively. One respondent said that he is “acutely aware of the law and continues to learn on the job.”

His courtroom management is considered effective, swift and organized. He is noted for valuing settlement and working diligently to promote and reach settlement. Respondents called him “attentive” and noted that he gives attorneys “time to argue” but “won’t keep you there all day.”

Judge Roti is considered fair and even-tempered. Several respondents noted that they do not mind losing in his courtroom because they know Judge Roti is fair. Judge Roti is managing his duties effectively and efficiently. He shows appropriate temperament and diligence in his work.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Roti’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Roti, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



LISA RUBLE-MURPHY
Domestic Relations Division
Elected 1994

Biography

Lisa Ruble-Murphy graduated from IIT/Chicago-Kent College of Law. Prior to becoming a Judge, she was a Deputy Chief Administration Officer for the Chicago City Council's Committee on Finance.

Judicial Background

Lisa Ruble-Murphy was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994. Judge Ruble-Murphy was initially assigned to the First Municipal District of the Cook County Circuit Court. In January 1995, she was assigned to the Domestic Relations Division, where she currently serves.

Strengths

Judge Ruble-Murphy is considered to be a smart and knowledgeable judge. She is reported to have a good temperament and is praised for her fairness and for her trial management ability.

Weaknesses

Many respondents praised her as a judge, but nearly half of respondents had concerns about Judge Ruble-Murphy's judicial performance. Respondents say that she gives a fair trial, but complained that she inappropriately discouraged parties from going to trial even where the parties have clear and irreconcilable difficulties. Respondents reported that Judge Ruble-Murphy actively pursues a judicial approach of demanding that the parties settle prior to trial, but a substantial number of respondents report that this approach is sometimes not in the best interest of their clients. Some respondents also reported that she is often late in starting her call.

Conclusion

Judge Ruble-Murphy is reported to be having difficulties in the area of courtroom management that impede her effectiveness as a jurist. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

Court-watching
Peer Mentoring
Re-evaluation within three years



DRELLA SAVAGE

Law Division

Elected 1994

Biography

Drella Savage graduated from Howard University School of Law. She was in private practice and served as an election law attorney for the City of Chicago.

Judicial Background

Drella Savage was elected in 1994. She was initially assigned to the Child Support Enforcement Division and transferred to the Law Division in 2009.

Strengths

Judge Savage is considered prompt and polite by most respondents. Respondents report that “she runs a tight ship” and both the judge and her staff drew compliments for the management of the courtroom. The majority of respondents believe she has a good legal ability. Judge Savage displays common sense and an even temperament, according to most respondents.

Judge Savage is characterized as a competent judge who runs an efficient courtroom. She appears to approach her responsibilities with diligence and an appropriate demeanor. She is relatively new to the Law Division, but respondents indicate that she is learning the law and applying it appropriately.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Savage’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Savage, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



COLLEEN SHEEHAN
Juvenile Division
Elected 2000

Biography

Colleen Sheehan graduated from the John Marshall Law School. She was in private practice and also served as an Assistant Cook County Public Defender. She worked as a hearing officer for Chicago's Administrative Hearing Department.

Judicial Background

Colleen Sheehan was elected to the Circuit Court in 2000 and was assigned to the First Municipal District, Domestic Violence Division. She currently presides over a Juvenile Court call.

Strengths

Judge Sheehan is considered to have a good legal ability, with a firm grasp of the law and procedure underlying her present juvenile court practice. She is described as "probing", "thoughtful" and "smart", with strong command of the rules of evidence and procedure. She is considered to be a hard-working, diligent jurist.

Her integrity, temperament and fairness all received high marks; many practitioners applauded her patience, particularly with parents and juveniles who required more than one advisement. She is praised for her tone and demeanor. Some practitioners noted a positive improvement over the years in her temperament relating to parents of juvenile defendants.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Sheehan's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Sheehan, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



DIANE SHELLEY
First Municipal District
Elected 2006

Biography

Diane Shelley graduated from the University of Iowa College of Law. She was in private practice in both legal aid and domestic practice. Prior to becoming a Circuit Court judge, she served as the Head Assistant Attorney for the Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and as a hearing officer for the City of Chicago Department of Revenue.

Judicial Background

Diane Shelley was elected in 2006. She was initially assigned to the Domestic Violence Division, and transferred to the First Municipal District in January 2010.

Strengths

Respondents generally had a positive opinion of Judge Shelley, considering her “effective, efficient and professional” and another found her “acceptable and worthy of her position.” She appears to be handling her cases appropriately, in a timely and professional fashion.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Shelley’s judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Shelley, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JAMES FITZGERALD SMITH

Appellate Court

Appointed to the Circuit Court in 1989

Elected to the Circuit Court in 1994

Elected to the Appellate Court in 2002

Biography

James Fitzgerald Smith graduated from the John Marshall Law School. He served as Assistant Corporation Counsel of Chicago and City Attorney and City Prosecutor of Des Plaines.

Judicial Background

James Fitzgerald Smith was appointed to the Circuit Court of Cook County in 1989 and elected in 1994. He was elected to the Appellate Court in 2002.

Strengths

Judge Smith is reported to be well-prepared and mild-mannered on the bench. Attorneys with experience before Judge Smith note that he has a good reputation among appellate attorneys and is known for asking good questions during argument. He is a well-respected appellate justice. His opinions are well reasoned and well written. He was criticized in the past for his temperament as a trial judge, but has received nothing but praise as an appellate judge.

Judge Smith is considered an asset to the court for his advocacy of the Settlement Committee. He receives praise for settling cases and for the quality of his opinions.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Smith's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Smith, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



JAMES M. VARGA
Law Division, Jury Section
Elected 1994

Biography

James M. Varga graduated from the Notre Dame Law School. He was a supervisor in the Medical Litigation Division of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, as well as a felony prosecutor. Mr. Varga also spent some time in private practice.

Judicial Background

James M. Varga was elected to the Circuit Court in 1994 and was initially assigned to the First Municipal District. He moved to the Law Division in 1995 and has served there since.

Strengths

Responses indicate that Judge Varga puts considerable thought and effort into his judicial duties. He is generally regarded as diligent and knowledgeable. Judge Varga reports that he authors articles and lectures on issues of juries and verdicts. He is singled out for praise by respondents for his handling of jury selections. Respondents believe that his manner of organizing issues identified for trial prior to jury selection is helpful to both sides of the case.

Judge Varga is considered hard-working, with good legal ability and a commitment to doing his own research where necessary. Attorneys also noted that Judge Varga appears to consult with other judges in his division where appropriate or necessary. He is known to run a well-functioning courtroom and to be diligent and hard-working.

Weaknesses

A substantial number of lawyers report that Judge Varga has temperament issues. There is no suggestion that he is biased or disfavors particular groups in his courtroom. Rather, respondents characterize his temper as unpredictable and directed at attorneys, witnesses and litigants alike. However, Judge Varga has reported to the Judicial Performance Commission that he acknowledges his temperament problem and is taking action to remedy his difficulties.

Conclusion

A substantial number of respondents reported concerns in one or more category relating to Judge Varga's judicial performance. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. A judicial performance improvement plan is indicated. The Commission recommends the following:

Court-watching
Peer Mentoring
Re-evaluation within three years



CARL ANTHONY WALKER

Juvenile Division

Appointed 2006

Elected 2006

Biography

Carl Anthony Walker graduated from the University of Iowa College of Law. He was in private practice in Illinois and worked as an Administrative Hearing Officer for the City of Chicago.

Judicial Background

Carl Anthony Walker was appointed and then elected to the Circuit Court of Cook County in 2006. He initially sat in the First Municipal District and was transferred to the Juvenile Division in 2009.

Strengths

Interviewees generally had a favorable impression of Judge Walker. His respectful demeanor and investment in the welfare of the juveniles was noted by everyone. He is said to bring good insight to the bench, treating juvenile defendants as individuals. One attorney described him as "honest and conscious of his role in protecting the integrity of the court."

Judge Walker is often described as being especially caring about the welfare of the children before him and concerned about parental involvement. He is praised for his temperament and his fairness. He is praised for his ability to deal with highly emotional issues and is reported to be respectful of everyone in his courtroom.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Walker's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Walker, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



RICHARD WALSH
Juvenile Division
Elected 1994

Biography

Richard Walsh graduated from DePaul University College of Law and from the University of Nevada where he completed a Masters of Judicial Studies. He was a law clerk in the U.S. District Court and a solo practitioner. He also served as a Staff Attorney in the Federal Defender Program and a Hearing Officer for the Illinois Racing Board.

Judicial Background

Richard Walsh was elected to the bench in November, 1994. He was initially assigned to the First Municipal Division. Judge Walsh was transferred to the Juvenile Justice Division, where he currently sits.

Strengths

Judge Walsh was praised for his legal ability. Practitioners noted his strong command of the procedure, evidence, and case law. Additionally, some noted with appreciation that he "is clearly up to date on the case law." Judge Walsh reportedly shares recent case law and updates on the status of the law with the practitioners appearing in front of him. He is generally considered a respected jurist.

Weaknesses

A few respondents noted that there have been issues concerning Judge Walsh's temperament in the past, but that his temperament has improved over the past several years.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Walsh, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



CAMILLE WILLIS
Sixth Municipal District
Appointed 1995
Elected 2000

Biography

Camille Willis graduated from the Ohio State University College of Law. She clerked for the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals and served as an attorney with the Chicago Board of Education.

Judicial Background

Camille Willis was appointed to the Circuit Court of Cook County in 1995 and elected in 2000. She was initially assigned to the First Municipal District and then to the Child Protection Division. In 1998, Judge Willis was transferred to the Sixth Municipal District, where she currently sits.

Strengths

Judge Willis is praised for diligently handling a large docket often consisting of a large number of *pro se* litigants and for doing so competently. She is described as taking the time necessary to ensure that individuals in her court understand the proceedings. Practitioners appreciate her demeanor and tone, describing her as “humorous and respectful”, “polite and patient”, as well as “respectful and professional.” Her judicial integrity was unquestioned, and practitioners clearly hold Judge Willis’ ethics in high regard. Survey respondents stated that she was ethically beyond reproach, careful to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.

Weaknesses

Some respondents believe that Judge Willis projects a lack of confidence in her rulings and allows her call to move too slowly at times.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Willis, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.



E. KENNETH WRIGHT
First Municipal District
Appointed 1994
Elected 1994

Biography

Kenneth Wright graduated from Northwestern University School of Law. Prior to becoming a judge, he was in private practice as a solo practitioner. He is a former teacher and Associate Dean of Joliet Junior College.

Judicial Background

Kenneth Wright was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1994, and was elected the same year. He was initially assigned to the Municipal Division and later was transferred to the Probate Division. He presently serves as presiding judge of the First Municipal District.

Strengths

Judge Wright received positive marks from practitioners in all categories with very few criticisms of his judicial performance. He is described as being a knowledgeable jurist and administrator. Respondents believe he moves through his call efficiently and is respectful of the practitioners appearing in front of him. Judge Wright is described as having a good, calm demeanor. He reportedly treats everyone with respect in both his role as a judge on the bench, and as a Presiding Judge.

As Presiding Judge of the First Municipal District, Judge Wright is responsible for overseeing the judicial schedule and has worked with the City of Chicago on improvements to the eviction call. Judge Wright has been active in promoting the center for conflict resolution, which has increased the efficiency of the First Municipal District by allowing easier cases to be resolved through mediation. He has also initiated a steering committee on which attorneys, clerks, judges, and the Sheriff worked together to streamline procedures for appointing special process servers and for consolidation. Many respondents praise his leadership.

Respondents say that Judge Wright was well-respected when he had a full-time call in the Probate Division. He was praised for his temperament and courtroom management.

Weaknesses

Our investigation revealed no substantial weaknesses in Judge Wright's judicial performance.

Conclusion

Based upon the positive information in the above report concerning Judge Wright, a judicial performance improvement plan is not warranted.