



Supreme Court of Illinois

September 24, 2020

ILLINOIS JUDGES TAKING PART IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TO ADDRESS OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Project ECHO, an Appalachian/Midwest Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative (RJOI) program, has officially kicked off in Illinois. Project ECHO provides education on issues including the physiology of addiction, evidence-based programming interventions, and medication assisted treatment to Illinois judges in order to help judges address opioid abuse in criminal and family court cases.

The Project ECHO pilot consists of seven one-hour Zoom calls in which two doctors from the University of Chicago engage 15 judges from across Illinois in a weekly session. In the first 40 minutes of the session, the medical experts present information about opioids, addiction, evidence-based programs and medication for opioid use disorder and answer questions from the participating judges. The remaining 20 minutes of each session focuses on group discussion of how opioids impact individuals judges encounter daily in their courtrooms and developing strategies to assist and manage these situations.

“The opioid epidemic has had a profound effect on our communities and judicial system,” Chief Justice Anne M. Burke said. “The Illinois Courts continue to be proactive in addressing this issue through collaborative programs like Project ECHO.”

The Leadership Committee for the RJOI is comprised of the Chief Justices and State Court Administrators of each of the RJOI states. The Leadership Committee creates the organization and decision-making structure of the initiative. They determine the scope of work, goals and strategies, and establish committees. They appoint the members of the Judicial Committee, which is comprised of at least two judges from each state. These “judicial champions” guide the day to day work of the initiative.

“This opportunity to learn from medical experts on the science of addiction and evidence-based best practices when interacting with litigants with opioid abuse issues is invaluable and will help us as judges better meet the challenges the opioid crisis has had on children, families and justice involved individuals we see every day in our courtrooms,” said Cook County Circuit Judge Maureen Ward Kirby, judicial coordinator for Illinois Project ECHO and a member of the Illinois RJOI team. “I am very appreciative of the collaborative efforts of the RJOI, the National Center for State Courts, and the Supreme Court of Illinois Judicial College Committee on Education for making this webinar series available.”

The RJOI was formed in 2016 in response to the need for information, education, and resources to address the opioid epidemic. The eight RJOI states include: Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Additional information is available [here](#).

Project ECHO was initiated by the University of New Mexico in 2003 in the medical field with doctors mentoring other doctors. Additional information is available [here](#).

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