



# A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERT R. THOMAS

I am pleased to present, on behalf of my colleagues who serve on the Supreme Court of Illinois and the entire judicial branch of our state, the 2007 Annual Report of the Illinois Courts. The judicial branch has met many challenges and experienced much success this past year. The Supreme Court, with the assistance of our Administrative Office, has both initiated several key projects and maintained a steadfast commitment to the administration of justice. It has been my pleasure to serve as Chief Justice during this exciting and productive period and I am proud to provide this report.

The expanding utilization of technology in the courts continues to be both an extraordinary benefit and administrative challenge to the judicial branch. No aspect of the justice system has been unaffected as technology enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of court services and functions. However, with increasingly sophisticated technologies comes the need to ensure systems and services are accessible to all, regardless of technical ability. Uniform and sound procedures and privacy protections must be incorporated.

In 2006, the Court adopted the *Electronic Business Initiative* as an overarching strategy to provide a framework

to ensure access and provide compatibility and uniformity in technology among all of Illinois' trial courts. In an effort to expand our knowledge base of existing technologies available to implement the Court's strategy, a Request for Information (RFI) was released in 2007. The RFI will form a component of the foundation necessary to ensure that the *Electronic Business Initiative* is implemented through informed decisions which consider the broad scope of resources available.

The Court established the "*Standards for Accepting Electronic Pleas of Guilty in the Illinois Courts Pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 529*" in 2006. These standards create an environment for the orderly development of practices and procedures relating to the internet-based submission and verification of guilty pleas in minor traffic and conservation offenses. In 2007, requests to develop e-Guilty programs have been received from a number of circuits. Several will likely be implemented in early 2008. In addition, the Electronic Filing (e-Filing) pilot programs in Cook and Will Counties are being finalized while the e-Filing Pilot Project in DuPage County provides the Court with valuable data and insight into a variety of electronic business issues.

The Court's interest in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the judicial component of the child welfare system remains high. In September 2007, the first ever Illinois Summit on Child Welfare Issues was hosted by the Court. Interdisciplinary teams from all 23 circuits participated in the three-day event held in Chicago. The Summit provided a springboard for local projects fostering systematic change throughout the state.

During 2007, final preparations were made for the delivery of the new 30-hour Mandatory Continuing Judicial Education program. This comprehensive program will require every judge in Illinois to participate in a week-long Education Conference. This effort is designed not only to present training in the law, but will also address issues of judicial conduct, ethics, and professionalism.

Before closing these remarks, I would like to briefly note the work of the Administrative Office. Under the leadership of the Supreme Court's Administrative Director, Cynthia Y. Cobbs, it serves as the administrative arm of the Supreme Court. The Administrative Office provides organizational, administrative and technical

support to all three levels of Illinois' courts and serves as liaison to the Supreme Court's various committees. The Administrative Director and staff work with the Chief Justice and the Court to prepare, present and implement policy matters affecting the judiciary. These matters include fiscal and programmatic issues, rules, projects involving the other branches of state government, and interaction with organizations outside the Judicial Branch. A more detailed description of the responsibilities and programs of each of the divisions of the Administrative Office is contained elsewhere in this publication.

I welcome your review of the work and accomplishments of the Illinois Judicial Branch and the Administrative Office as contained in this 2007 Annual Report and am grateful to all who have assisted with the numerous projects and initiatives featured herein. It has been my great privilege to serve you and to work with you as your Chief Justice.



Robert R. Thomas  
Chief Justice



*Inside the Illinois Supreme Court*