

OVERVIEW OF THE ILLINOIS JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

The Supreme Court of Illinois created the Illinois Judicial Conference in 1953 in the interest of maintaining a well-informed judiciary, active in improving the administration of justice. The Conference has met annually since 1954 and has the primary responsibility for the creation and supervision of the continuing judicial education efforts in Illinois.

The Judicial Conference was incorporated into the 1964 Supreme Court Judicial Article and is now provided for in Article VI, Section 17, of the 1970 Constitution. Supreme Court Rule 41 implements section 17 by establishing membership in the Conference, creating an Executive Committee to assist the Supreme Court in conducting the Conference, and appointing the Administrative Office as secretary of the Conference.

In 1993, the Supreme Court continued to build upon past improvements in the administration of justice in this state. The Judicial Conference of Illinois was restructured to more fully meet the constitutional mandate that “the Supreme Court shall provide by rule for an annual Judicial Conference to consider the work of the courts and to suggest improvements in the administration of justice and shall report thereon annually in writing to the General Assembly.” The restructuring of the Conference was the culmination of more than two years of study and work. In order to make the Conference more responsive to the mounting needs of the judiciary and the administration of justice (1) the membership of the entire Judicial Conference was totally restructured to better address business of the judiciary; (2) the committee structure of the Judicial Conference was reorganized to expedite and improve the communication of recommendations to the Court; and (3) the staffing functions were overhauled and strengthened to assist in the considerable research work of committees and to improve communications among the Conference committees, the courts, the judges and other components of the judiciary.

The Judicial Conference, which formerly included all judges in the State of Illinois, with the exception of associate judges (approximately 500 judges), was downsized to a total Conference membership of 82. The membership of the reconstituted Conference includes:

Supreme Court Justices	7
Presiding judges of downstate appellate districts and chair of First District Executive Committee	5
Judges appointed from Cook County (including the chief judge and 10 associate judges)	30
Ten judges appointed from each downstate district (including one chief judge and 3 associate judges from each district)	<u>40</u>
Total Conference Membership	82

The first meeting of the reconstituted Conference convened December 2, 1993, in Rosemont, Illinois.

A noteworthy change in the Conference is that it now includes associate judges who comprise more than a quarter of the Conference membership. In addition to having all classifications of judges represented, the new structure continues to provide for diverse geographical representation.

Another important aspect of the newly restructured Conference is that the Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court presides over both the Judicial Conference and the Executive Committee of the Conference, thus providing a strong link between the Judicial Conference and the Supreme Court.

The natural corollary of downsizing the Conference, and refocusing the energies and resources of the Conference on the management aspect of the judiciary, is that judicial education will now take place in a different and more suitable environment, rather than at the annual meeting of the Conference. A comprehensive judicial education plan was instituted in conjunction with the restructuring of the Judicial Conference. The reconstituted judicial education committee was charged with completing work on the comprehensive education plan, and with presenting the plan for consideration at the first annual meeting of the reconstituted Judicial Conference. By separating the important functions of judicial education from those of the Judicial Conference, more focus has been placed upon the important work of providing the best and most expanded educational opportunities for Illinois judges. These changes have improved immensely the quality of continuing education for Illinois judges.