



STATE OF ILLINOIS
CIRCUIT COURT
22ND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
McHENRY COUNTY, ILLINOIS



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For Immediate Release

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**22nd Judicial Circuit of McHenry County Announces
New Small Claims Mediation Program**

Woodstock, IL - The 22nd Judicial Circuit of McHenry County is pleased to announce the launch of a new Small Claims Mediation Program, the first of its kind in Illinois, pioneering an initiative aimed at streamlining dispute resolution in small claims cases. This mandatory program will now require all small claims litigants to engage in mediation before a trial date is set.

“ADR – Alternative Dispute Resolution – has developed to offer parties state-of-the-art options to address issues of conflict,” explains Chief Judge Michael Chmiel. “Our judicial system stands ready, willing, and able to decide issues which are presented, but if parties can resolve issues on their own through mediation, they are likely to arrive at results which may be better for them.”

Under this innovative program, and prior to setting a trial date, the Court will issue a Small Claims Mediation Order directing the parties to mediation. The mediation sessions will be facilitated by Agnes Kretowicz, who otherwise serves as the Arbitration Administrator for the Circuit, as an employee of the State of Illinois. Through its local budget, the Court sponsored Ms. Kretowicz in completing a forty-hour Mediation Skills Training Course at Northwestern University. The Court then looked to leverage available capacity.

“Though our work with the State of Illinois and the County of McHenry, we continue to look for ways to maximize the value of our resources,” says Judge Chmiel.

This program is designed to address the specific challenges faced by most small claims litigants, many of whom are self-represented and unfamiliar with legal procedures. A recent Circuit report

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shows a significant need for such a program, where 2,269 small claims cases filed between December 2022 and December 2023 involved at least one self-represented party.

Mediation in small claims offers a suite of benefits that cater directly to the needs of litigants. It is cost-effective, reducing the financial burden often associated with traditional litigation, which can sometimes exceed the disputed amount itself. The process is also time-efficient, resolving disputes much faster than conventional court proceedings. Furthermore, mediation provides a flexible, non-adversarial environment where litigants can negotiate solutions that are mutually beneficial, preserving personal and business relationships that might otherwise be damaged by court battles.

”Best is that participants in mediation reach agreements which are purely voluntary,” further explains Judge Chmiel. “Next best is that the Court is able to expeditiously move cases to more prompt resolutions.”

The 22nd Judicial Circuit is committed to fostering a judicial environment where disputes are resolved with fairness, efficiency, and integrity. The Small Claims Mediation Program is expected to significantly contribute to these goals, benefiting the citizens of McHenry County by providing a more accessible and equitable form of justice.

“I am so glad to see this program come into fruition” said Dan Wallis, Trial Court Administrator. “This program represents a significant step towards making our justice system more accessible and responsive to the needs of our community. By facilitating earlier, cooperative resolutions in small claims cases, we are not only helping to alleviate the burden on our courts but also ensuring that all parties have a meaningful opportunity to participate in the resolution of their disputes.”

This program with an on-staff mediator, is a first in Illinois. It was developed over this past year, then pitched to the Supreme Court of Illinois in June through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, which approved the program in August. It is hoped that this program will become a model for the rest of the State and expand over time to incorporate other types of civil cases.

For more information about the Small Claims Mediation Program, please contact Agnes Kretowicz at the 22nd Judicial Circuit’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Center at 815-337-0582.

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