



News Release

FROM: Chambers of the Chief Judge
19th Judicial Circuit
Lake County
Waukegan, Illinois 60085-4359

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Waukegan, Illinois

FIRST EARLY RESOLUTION PROGRAM COURT CALL IN LAKE COUNTY

On March 26, 2019, Judge James K. Simonian presided over the first Early Resolution Program (ERP) court call in Lake County. The ERP is a program designed to assist self-represented litigants seeking uncontested divorces. “The goal is to shorten the time between case filing to disposition, which will reduce costs due to lost wages for litigants to attend court hearings, provide meaningful access to the judicial system, reduce the number of case processing steps and hopefully the number of post disposition hearings,” said Chief Judge Jay W. Ukena. The ERP was developed in response to the Illinois Supreme Court’s Access to Justice initiative.

In November 2018, the 19th Judicial Circuit was awarded a \$15,000 grant from the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice to create this program and to provide equipment to support a dedicated self-represented litigant family courtroom. “In Lake County nearly 53% of pending cases have at least one party that is self-represented. The 19th recognizes that many times cases without the assistance of counsel struggle to achieve meaningful access to the court which translates into frustration for the litigant,” added Chief Judge Ukena.

The ERP is one tool the 19th Judicial Circuit is using to improve the litigant’s interaction with the court system. The ERP coordinator reviews petitions and selects parties with minimal issues to participate in the program. In one afternoon, the selected parties meet with an attorney from Prairie State Legal Services to help resolve issues and complete paperwork. Self-Represented Litigants then proceed to the courtroom for prove up and entry of a judgment of dissolution.

Seven cases participated in the first ERP court call. Five cases were “proved up” resulting in entry of a judgment of dissolution of marriage which completed the case. The oldest case was 83 days old, the newest case was filed just 35 days prior to today’s date.

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Circuit Judge Charles W. Smith, Presiding Judge of the Family Division noted, “The addition of the ERP court call, in partnership with Prairie State Legal Services, assists self-represented litigants with family and dissolution cases and helps them navigate the legal process. We look forward to increasing the number of litigants taking advantage of this opportunity.”

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