RESOURCE GUIDE - S4E2

Curing "Petty, Everyday Injustice" in Cook County







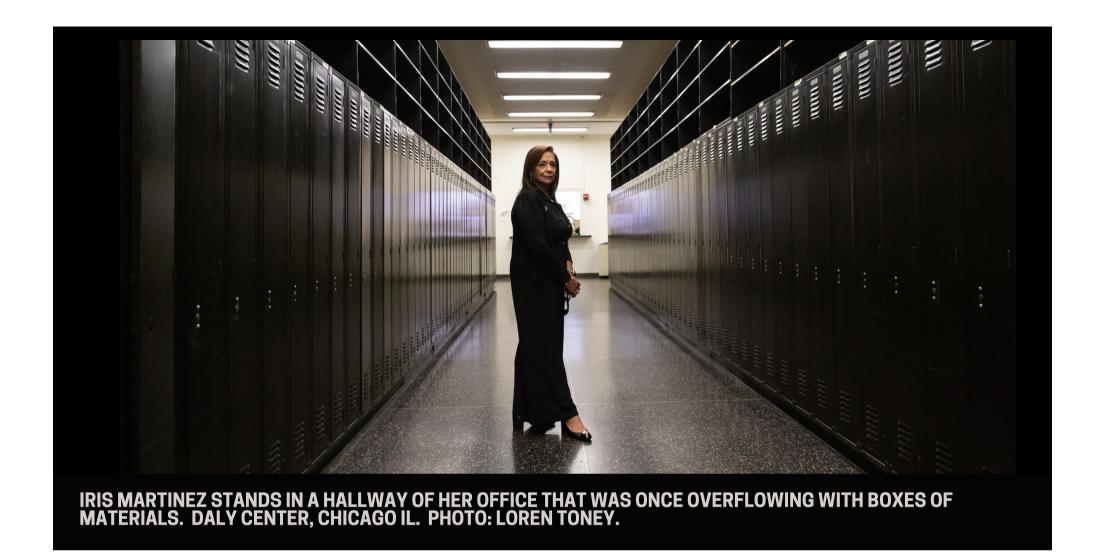






70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.





"I MEAN, THIS INVOLVES PEOPLE'S FREEDOM. I **HAD CLERKS WRITE DOWN THE WRONG NUMBER OF DAYS OF CREDIT ON PEOPLE'S** PAPERWORK WHEN THEY **WENT TO PRISON, AND** THEY SHOWED UP AND THEY WERE TOLD THEIR **PRISON SENTENCES WERE LONGER THAN** THEY SHOULD BE." - SARAH STAUDT

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you have any idea whether your local ballot includes an official who is partly responsible for making the legal system in your county run smoothly?
- If you've ever voted in that race, why did you choose to vote the way you
- After considering these, what if anything might want to change about how you approach voting—not just for that official but in general?
- Have you or somebody you know had an experience with a court in your area? If so, how did it go, and how did the efficiency of record keeping play a role in that experience? For example, have you tried to look up the details of a case or what to do next in a court process and encounter trouble finding that information?

A brief introduction to county clerkship in the United States ...

Every filing, decision, and official action that a court takes must go through one official: the clerk of the circuit court (sometimes called a court clerk), who manages the court's record-keeping. In some jurisdictions, the handler of court documents is its own office, as is the case with Cook County; in others, there is a county clerk who handles *all* county records (such as property deeds and marriage licenses) in addition to the court records. These positions are integral to court proceedings, and related mistakes affect almost every case.

For example, records systems and information technology can be decades old, and there can be significant miscommunication and misplacements of paperwork–especially for those jurisdictions who use carbon-copy paper rather than online systems. Therefore, clerk offices are at times responsible for delays in expungements and appeals, as we saw in Cook County. This dysfunction, while symptomatic of a greater lack of urgency and integrity for those who are jailed, is uniquely troubling because it is reflective of a system that is antiquated, faulty, and lesser-known by designrather than just being a matter of poor decision-making by individuals.

That said, the clerkship is an elected office, and one of the least understood on the ballot. That means when the clerk is failing, voters often don't know they can do something about it. Voter education efforts and voting especially in "down-ballot races," where big change can happen on the local level, are key for holding clerks accountable in the future.

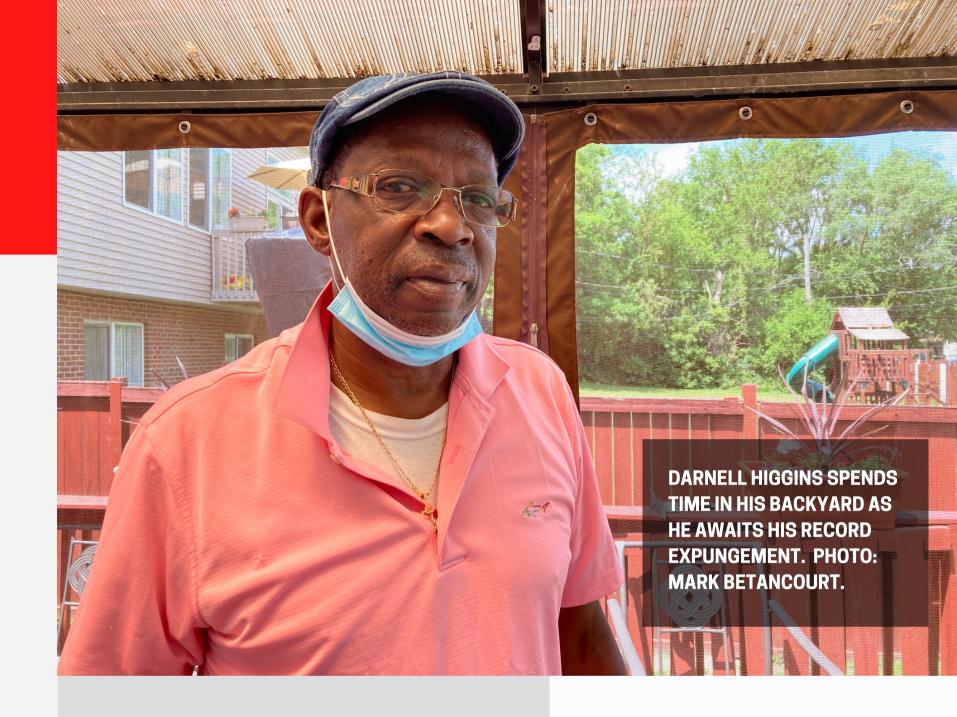
GET INVOLVED

CHECK YOUR COUNTY'S STATUS

The National Association of Counties provided us data that indicates whether a given US county elects its clerk. To find your county's status, choose your state from the landing page. Note that counties are listed in alphabetical order and that data are unavailable for three states.

If your county has an election, we encourage you to educate yourself on who your current elected clerk is, what they have done in their term, and who upcoming candidates are. When the time comes, be sure to vote and encourage others to as well.

VIEW DATA →



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LOCAL SUPPORT

See if there are opportunities to volunteer with your local legal aid groups and organizations. Search: "[Your city/state/region] legal aid volunteer

Keep Reading



GENERAL

Record Delays. - Better Government Association.

COOK COUNTY

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT: FIRST 100 DAYS PROGRESS REPORT

Waiting for Justice: An examination of the Cook County Criminal Court backlog in the age of COVID-19.

OTHER AREAS IN THE U.S.

Lancaster County commissioners regret clerical error that kept inmate in prison 17 months after his release date

Louisville Court Chaos Leaves Some Unaware They're Missing Court Dates

Hobbs vs. City of Horn Lake

ADAM KANEY REVIEWS PAPER COURT FILES IN HIS CAR OUTSIDE THE COOK COUNTY JAIL IN CHICAGO, IL. PHOTO: LOREN TONEY

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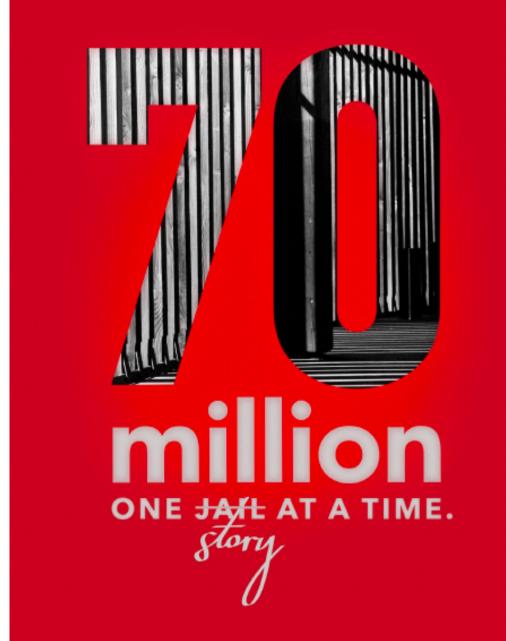
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