The Cabonargi Reform Plan

for the

Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court's Office

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Transparency ★ ★ ★

Establish new era of ethical practices in the Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office

• Refuse to take campaign dollars from employees in the office.
• Fight corruption. Expose misconduct that exists in the office—and stop it.

Reduce the amount of fees required to file a lawsuit and clearly state the structure of court fees

• Cook County has some of the highest filing fees in the country. We need to move away from relying on those seeking justice and relief in the courtroom to fund the court system.
• These fees affect not only attorneys, but working families who have to use the court system to receive justice. We must simplify and clarify the fee structure while also reducing the cost of using the people’s legal system in Cook County.
• The process of filing legal documents with the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s office can be frustrating. We need increased training for staff to better guide people through the legal system in Cook County.

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**Technology ★ ★ ★**

**Bring the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office into the 21st century**

- The Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office needs transformative change. The office is stuck in the 20th century, using carbon paper instead of digital solutions.

- Let’s bring the office into the 21st century and maximize technology to promote best practices, while also saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

- Effective technology can automate processes and open greater access to the courts. In an age of “e-everything,” the Clerk of the Circuit Court must ensure everyone’s rights are protected. Smart, effective business practices must drive technology reform.

- We must update and integrate the e-filing system in the Cook County court system, from the Chief Judge to probate courts. This will help ensure everyone interacting with the Cook County courts will have equal access to justice.

- We must update the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office’s electronic data system to provide online calendar information and to send text or email reminders of court dates, rather than the current system of mailed post cards.

- We will offer free wireless internet access to jurors.

**Digitize the office to save taxpayer money**

- Cook County recently spent $24 million to build a new warehouse for the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office to store paper court records. We need to go into this massive storage warehouse and begin the process of digitizing all court files.

- Document imaging and other digital solutions will result in millions of dollars in savings for the taxpayers of Cook County and help guarantee we no longer build costly new buildings.

- The process of digitizing old records may be cumbersome and challenging, but the end result will be easier access to court records, more transparency, and a fairer legal process in Cook County.

**Integrate new technology into the office**

- The office needs a dedicated Chief Innovation Officer to lead and drive technology development and implementation whenever possible.

- The office must create collaborative partnerships with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations such as Code for America that will help integrate modern, accessible solutions in the office.

- We will make the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s website more user friendly and interactive and develop a mobile application with answers to common questions and the option for a live chat.

- We will develop and expand online tutorials and courthouse tours to feature interviews with judges about how to navigate the courtroom, how to prepare for a courthouse visit, and what to expect as a juror.

- We will establish teleconference, video, and electronic court appearances and allow for online dispute resolution, where appropriate.

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Talent

Perform a top down forensic investigation of work performed in the Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office to root out corruption and bad practices and to recognize and reward talent

- The Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office has been plagued with scandals, investigations, and convictions. Public trust and confidence in the courts system are critical to their functioning in society.
- We will change the culture and the conduct in the office and bring in a new era of justice and credibility. We will recruit new talent and ensure it’s no longer business as usual in the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office.
- And on Day One, I will order an independent forensic investigation of the office to identify waste and ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent efficiently.

Eliminate patronage jobs in the office and promote hard and smart work

- For too long, the Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office has been a bureaucratic mess due to patronage hiring.
- We need to instead enhance transparency and hire, retain, and promote qualified hard workers.

Create and implement an open data policy

- There is an extraordinary amount of information that goes through the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office.
- The office should work with the Cook County Chief Data Officer to understand what data can be publicized on Cook County’s data portal, respecting the sensitivity of documents that pass through the court system.
Social Justice Reforms

Implement a cannabis conviction expungement program

- In January 2020, thousands of Cook County residents are eligible to expunge their cannabis convictions, and the Clerk of the Circuit Court’s Office is not ready.

- The problem lies in the filing structure of the office. The records have not been properly filed, and this process will take much longer and could delay justice for thousands of people.

- I will work with the Cook County Sheriff, State’s Attorney, Public Defender, Department of Corrections, Illinois State Police and the State of Illinois to locate and consolidate records and expediently expunge records of non-violent offenders convicted of cannabis offenses.

- By working with other stakeholders in Cook County, the Clerk of the Circuit Court can ensure justice is granted to residents in Illinois.

Decrease the amount of debt placed on individuals in the court system

- We will work to reduce assessments and fines on individuals who cannot afford to pay them, an issue that predominantly affects the most vulnerable communities in Cook County in Cook County.

- We will work to implement community service or restorative justice programs in lieu of fees or fines.

- We will work with Secretary of State Jesse White to stop suspending driver licenses for those who cannot afford to pay unfair fees and fines placed on them.