

Chief Judge Evans announces sweeping reforms to bail setting procedures

Circuit Court of Cook County Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans today announced sweeping reforms of Central Bond Court at 26th and California. Pursuant to an order he issued today, arrestees will now physically appear before a judge for bail hearings instead of appearing via closed circuit television. Also for the first time, judges will now receive pretrial assessments of felony arrestees to give them access to objective information as they make decisions about the terms and conditions of bail.

The changes, which are effective December 15, 2008, comply with national standards set forth by the National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies and the American Bar Association.

Also under the reforms, judges will be able to order comprehensive pretrial supervision by the court's Pretrial Services Unit of the Adult Probation Department as a condition of bail, and detainees in the Cook County Jail can now expect ongoing review of their status to ensure the most efficient and effective use of pretrial release.

Chief Judge Evans said, "These reforms move us from a woefully inadequate pretrial system to one that improves an arrestee's opportunity to receive due process. The result will be a fairer system of pretrial justice in which more information is available to the judge, the voice of the accused can be heard in person and the community can be better protected."

"The reforms also underscore my emphasis on integrity as the means to enhance the way justice is done in Cook County," Evans added.

Noting that ending the use of closed circuit television will restore dignity and effectiveness to bail hearings, Evans said, "Returning defendants physically to a courtroom puts them side by side with their attorneys, and face to face with the judge and the prosecutors, to pursue their quest for due process, which is the cornerstone of the national standards. The return of the accused to open court also permits family members and other witnesses to present testimony on behalf of and demonstrate support for the defendants."

Evans said another key reform is the expansion of operations of the Pretrial Services Unit of the Circuit Court of Cook County's Adult Probation Department operating at 26th and California. The mission of the unit is to assist the court by preparing pretrial assessments of individuals charged with felonies for use by judges in making decisions about the terms and conditions of bail and by providing pretrial supervision to those released on bond. Pretrial assessments provide independent and impartial information about a detainee's criminal history, ties to the community, and employment and health issues. Pretrial supervision monitors a defendant's compliance with conditions of bail and provides guidance, surveillance and referrals to service providers to assist a defendant in fulfilling those conditions.

Staff of the Pretrial Services Unit of the Adult Probation Department will use a risk assessment instrument that is based on the nationally recognized Virginia Model to score an arrestee's potential threat to public safety and risk for flight. In addition to the validated risk factors, the form also provides for the consideration of other pertinent facts to assist judges with the bail decision.

Other changes include the addition of a second court call on weekdays and the relocation of Central Bond Court to Room 100 of the Criminal Court Building. Chief Judge Evans said the offices of the State's Attorney, the Public Defender, the Clerk, the Sheriff and the Chicago Police Department have all agreed to support the changes he has made.