



Wisconsin Court System

Office of the Clerk of Circuit Court

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”

– William James

Clerks of circuit court are elected every four years in each of Wisconsin’s 72 counties and are statutorily responsible for various recordkeeping functions of the courts. As custodians of the courts’ records, clerks of circuit court play a significant role in Wisconsin’s judicial system.

Custodian of the Record

Recordkeeping for the courts is governed by state statutes and Wisconsin Supreme Court rule. These require that clerks maintain records of all documents filed with the courts, keep a record of court proceedings, keep records of liens and money judgments, and collect various fees, fines, and forfeitures ordered by the court or specified by statute. Clerks of circuit court must allow reasonable access to court records and maintain the confidentiality of records as set forth by statute and court order.

Model court recordkeeping was formalized in 1983 with the creation of the Model Court Recordkeeping Manual. Statewide model court recordkeeping practices and state designed and approved forms and guidelines form the foundation of effective court record management in Wisconsin. Model court recordkeeping and forms are refined and updated on an on-going basis by the Wisconsin Court Records Management Committee. (RMC), which has been in existence since August 1984. RMC has two subcommittees. The Forms Subcommittee focuses on forms development, design and maintenance, including oversight of forms on the Wisconsin Courts website. The Procedures Subcommittee focuses on developing and maintaining the model court recordkeeping procedures for the clerks of circuit court. A RMC Records Retention Subcommittee is also convened when necessary to review issues of record retention. Members of the committee are appointed by the director of state courts.

Court Automation

Clerks of circuit court have been key players in the implementation of court automation – providing time, resources, and leadership on this challenging issue. Through the Consolidated Court Automation Programs (CCAP), clerks of circuit court have been provided equipment, software, and training that has allowed them to enhance the efficiency of their offices and increase public access to the courts.

Many clerks or their deputies serve on various design and policy committees that influence how court automation proceeds. Many clerks have helped to educate the public and the state Legislature on the importance of court automation.

Advances in technology have been utilized by many clerks and include the addition of such features as file tracking, remote access, court calendar kiosks, public access terminals, online juror questionnaires, and the ability to accept electronic payments and electronic filings. Clerks of circuit court statewide play a key role in the implementation of mandatory eFiling, text messaging reminders for appearances and SDC collection.

Jury Management

Jury management is also a responsibility of clerks of court. Automation, through CCAP, has made the process of selecting and notifying potential jurors much more efficient and has improved record-keeping for jury management. Clerks work with the director of state courts and the Legislature to continue to improve jury management. The most noticeable improvement has been the decrease in the time jurors are required to serve. Effective July 1, 1997, Wisconsin citizens are obligated for no more than one month of jury service in a four-year period.

Court Finances

Millions of dollars in fees, fines, and forfeitures are paid through clerks’ offices annually. Clerks of circuit court work to meet this fiscal responsibility with accurate, efficient, and effective accounting practices. The CCAP financial software, designed in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, assists clerks in efficiently handling this money.

Court Administration

As local court administrative personnel, clerks of court are at the center of an enormous variety of activities and work daily with many different people. Law enforcement, the legal community, local, state and federal agencies, businesses, and the general public depend upon the office of the clerk of circuit court to solve a wide range of problems.

Clerks of court provide an administrative link between the judiciary and the county boards and the public. Clerks also work closely with other court staff to ensure that the courts run smoothly and efficiently.

The administrative responsibilities at the circuit court level involve a variety of tasks. These include budgeting and administering trial court resources, developing effective policies, and procedures and recruiting and maintaining competent staff.