

The Problem- Solving Court Boom

| BY BECKY HOUGESEN WALTERS |

Alternative pathways for nonviolent criminal defendants
abound in Illinois' problem-solving courts.



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ISBA RESOURCES >>

- Justice Michael B. Hyman & Hon. Martha A. Mills (ret.), *Restorative Justice: The Virtuous Circle*, 108 Ill. B.J. 38 (Apr. 2020), law.isba.org/3pgp0pL.
- Janna M. Miller Midura & Elizabeth Bleakley, *Restorative Justice: An Overview*, Human Rights (Dec. 2019), law.isba.org/390pFRy.
- Hon. Richard L. Tognarelli, *Madison County's Veterans Treatment Court: A Model Program*, Bench & Bar (Nov. 2017), law.isba.org/rsXfn7o.

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE EVOLUTION AND EXPANSION OF PROBLEM-SOLVING

courts across Illinois, offers their use as a suggestion for relief for clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, and provides valuable information as to how an attorney may refer a client to problem-solving courts in many Illinois counties.

Few occasions in the criminal justice system warrant celebration. Early in my practice as a prosecutor, I believed a guilty verdict was one of them. A few assignments later and over two years in the felony review unit reviewing evidence in Cook County's most heinous crimes persuaded me that I was wrong. No matter the outcome, lives are destroyed, families are broken, and no one is truly "made whole" on either side of the courtroom.

But a little-known exception to the dismay of the criminal justice system exists in problem-solving courts (PSCs). PSCs do just that, solve problems. In a traditional, adversarial system, treatment court teams comprising prosecution, defense, a probation officer, a judge, and service providers work together to provide treatment for those charged with nonviolent offenses. While there are many kinds of PSCs, this article will mainly focus on treatment courts concerning drug-, mental health-, and veterans-related cases, and will also introduce other types of diversion and problem-solving programs across the state.

This article also will explore how these underutilized courts can aid those involved in the criminal justice system during the COVID-19 pandemic, which appears headed toward endemic status as the coronavirus continues to mutate and evade eradication.

PSCs: The origin story

The first PSC, a drug court, opened in Florida in Miami-Dade County in 1989 to address "drug-fueled" criminal recidivism.¹ PSCs are not only recognized on the state level, but nearly half of federal district courts have PSC programs.² By 1999, the U.S. saw 472 PSCs in operation.³ Cook County established Illinois' first PSC program with its drug court "RAP" in 1998.⁴ Cook County began its Mental Health Court in 2004⁵ and established its Veterans Treatment Court in 2009.⁶ In December 2015, the Illinois Supreme Court announced that uniform, evidence-based standards and a certification process for problem-solving courts throughout Illinois would be created.⁷ These standards and certifications were developed by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) and the Special Supreme Court Advisory Committee for Justice and Mental Health Planning.⁸

Not every PSC operates in precisely the same format; much discretion is left to judges and court administrators. However, common features include a designated period of probation or some duration of

1. Greg Berman & John Feinblatt, *Problem-Solving Courts: A Brief Primer*, 23 Law & Policy 2 (Apr. 2001).
2. Matthew G. Rowland, *Assessing the Case for Formal Recognition and Expansion of Federal Problem-Solving Courts*, 80 Federal Probation 3 (Dec. 2016).
3. Chris Deutsch & Jennifer Clumbel, *30 Years of Treatment Court*, All Rise (fall 2019), law.isba.org/3zoyVhQ.
4. Circuit Court of Cook County, Cook County Drug Court Treatment Program, law.isba.org/3Bbbzh5.
5. Circuit Court of Cook County, Mental Health Court Program, law.isba.org/3PyuUgv.
6. Alice R. Kush, *Coming to Every Judicial Circuit: Veterans Treatment Courts*, 105 Ill. B.J. 1, 42 (Jan. 2017), law.isba.org/3zr9o7W.
7. Illinois Courts, Problem Solving Courts, law.isba.org/3pmbP5O.
8. *Id.*

TAKEAWAYS >>

- Problem-solving courts are voluntary programs for nonviolent offenders who work with a court-assigned team of individuals toward successful completion of a treatment plan often in lieu of jail time or traditional probation.
- More than 100 problem-solving courts are in operation throughout Illinois for defendants with mental health and substance-abuse problems or who are veterans. Programs also are designed for emerging adults.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, problem-solving courts offer some defendants a way to receive treatment services and relief from case and service backlogs.

A FEW ASSIGNMENTS LATER AND OVER TWO YEARS IN THE FELONY REVIEW UNIT REVIEWING EVIDENCE IN COOK COUNTY'S MOST HEINOUS CRIMES PERSUADED ME THAT I WAS WRONG [ABOUT MY PREFERENCE FOR TRADITIONAL FORMS OF CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT]. NO MATTER THE OUTCOME, LIVES ARE DESTROYED, FAMILIES ARE BROKEN, AND NO ONE IS TRULY "MADE WHOLE" ON EITHER SIDE OF THE COURTROOM.

close supervision by the court. PSCs also will often include a specifically designated judge and staff who partake in regular training; coordinated treatment procedures; regular and close evaluation of participants, including continued assessments; and modification of court requirements based on compliance.⁹ Compliance with the PSC standards are monitored by the AOIC through application, certification, and recertification processes required by the Supreme Court. Some differences from county to county may include the types of PSCs offered, the format of completion or graduation of participants, and specific rewards and/or sanctions applied.

When a defendant is referred to a PSC as a possible participant, the client's eligibility will be determined using risk and clinical assessments.¹⁰ This initial screening process differs from county to county but is often the initial responsibility of probation officers, clinicians, and prosecutors, with the ultimate decision lying with the entire team and/or assigned judge. The precise referral and assessment process varies from county to county. (See Figure 2 on pages 34-35 for PSC information about specific Illinois counties.) Once a client is accepted into a PSC—if the client agrees to

participate, as these are strictly voluntary courts—the client will most often plead guilty with a term of probation to enter the program. Participation in a PSC is always completely voluntary. A client must agree to the terms set by the PSC team and accept them just as the PSC team must accept the client.

Once admitted into the PSC, the PSC team (judge, probation officer, prosecutor, public defender or private defense attorney, and treatment provider) meet on a regular basis to discuss the client's progress. The treatment provider reports on the status of treatment and the prosecutor reports on whether any additional criminal activity has been alleged. The team discusses pathways forward for the client and whether modifications to treatment plans or sanctions are needed. Typically, the client will progress through four phases of recovery. After successfully completing the fourth phase, the client will graduate from the program. However, there are typically four ways a participant may finish a PSC: successful, neutral, unsuccessful, or voluntary withdrawal.¹¹ It is generally a team decision to determine when a participant is to be terminated unsuccessfully. Sometimes, a participant can plead guilty to a violation and continue to participate in the PSC in anticipation that the participant will turn their treatment around. This is often viewed as an opportunity to successfully complete the program later (even though this also may mean a longer probation).

Although not a disadvantage, the potential of extending the probation period is a consideration that should be discussed with clients. Additionally, it should be noted that the PSCs are traditionally very intense. The participant is expected to complete and fully engage in the treatment, and even sanctions, required by the PSC team. This may include inpatient treatment; medication-assisted treatment; or, as a last resort, jail time. More-rigorous PSC programs have been described by participants as “tough love.”¹²

How it's going

Today, PSCs are the norm in Illinois as offerings have greatly expanded. According to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, as of 2017, there were 3,000 PSCs nationwide and 116 PSCs in Illinois.¹³ In Cook County alone, eight types of PSCs with treatment courts are provided for drug-, mental health-, and veterans-related defendants in each of its six districts.¹⁴ Cook County also provides diversion programs for first-time offenders (Branch 9), low-level narcotics possession cases (Drug Deferred Prosecution Program), local restorative justice courts, and programs for emerging adults.¹⁵

This rise in the number of PSCs is no accident. As reported in the Illinois Bar Journal, as of Jan. 1, 2018, each judicial circuit in Illinois was required to establish a veteran's treatment court.¹⁶

Statutory eligibility requirements also have expanded, from requiring agreement of the prosecutor to agreement solely by the defendant and with court approval.¹⁷ As seen in Figure 2, additional diversion programs focused on restorative justice, the emerging adult population, and first-time offenders are also now offered in many counties. A common question asked by Cook County defense attorneys was what programs existed for their clients and how could they refer a case for consideration to a PSC? Defense attorneys across the state can take advantage of PSCs available for their clients and understand how to refer them, as detailed

9. Michael J. Tardy, *Problem-Solving Courts Standards*, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, Supreme Court of Illinois (Nov. 2015), law.isba.org/3aW1wSv.

10. *Id.* at 20.

11. *Id.* at 33.

12. Frank Main, *This Cook County Judge Gives Convicts His Cell Number—If They Complete Addiction Program*, Chicago Sun-Times (Jan. 28, 2022), law.isba.org/3B8GzOC.

13. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, *An Overview of Problem-Solving Courts and Implications for Practice*, law.isba.org/3cA7PLS.

14. Circuit Court of Cook County, *Problem-Solving Court Locations*, law.isba.org/3PPOZOW.

15. Cook County State's Attorney's Office, *Diversion*, law.isba.org/3v82vWC.

16. Kush, *supra* note 6, at 42.

17. 730 ILCS 167/15(a).

in Figure 1. Figure 1 also offers a path forward for attorneys considering options for their clients.¹⁸

PSCs and COVID-19

In 2021, National Public Radio (NPR) reported that in 2020, more than 93,000 people died of a drug overdose—a nearly 30 percent increase from 2019.¹⁹ According to NPR, officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “... said the increase was driven by the lethal prevalence of fentanyl as well as pandemic-related stressors and problems in accessing care.”²⁰ Despite the pandemic, some PSCs found creative ways to serve those with drug-abuse problems. In Cook County, Problem Solving Court Director Kelly Gallivan-Illaraza said:

Cook County PSC had to pivot to continue operation during the global pandemic. The courts continued to operate utilizing Zoom for team staffing and court hearings. Probation and treatment shifted to virtual, online sessions and/or meetings by phone, to continue to engage and monitor participants. There were certain challenges, especially for clients who did not have access to technology and internet. Drug testing resumed with oral swabs but the frequency and inability to test on the spot, impacted the program’s ability to hold people accountable for the substance use immediately and in real time. We have learned a great deal and the PSC teams and participants demonstrated resiliency in the face of these challenges. Some of the benefits will be added to the PSC operations moving forward, such as having a hybrid model for both in person and virtual court hearings, which provides greater ability to attend for individuals who are in a residential treatment program or if they are employed.²¹

Referring a client to a PSC in your area could provide additional benefits beyond improving a client’s health, such as freeing up trial backlogs. (As a result of the pandemic, the Illinois Supreme Court ordered that speedy-trial rights could be suspended.²² Many criminal cases awaiting trial lingered on the docket. Rock Island County alone saw a backlog of 33,000 cases.²³ Cook County saw its backlog in felony cases increase by 22 percent.²⁴) While drug, veterans, and mental health

courts often involve two years of intensive probation, perhaps there are cases that should not have been queued in the first place. Difficult cases with clients who suffer from mental health issues may be better served in a PSC than awaiting trial. According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, among adults ages 18 or older in 2019, 5.2 percent (13.1 million people) had a serious mental illness. Of those, 47.2 percent (6.2 million people) did not have their treatment-services needs met.²⁵ Additionally, other types of PSCs, such as first offender programs, are often significantly less intensive and require a year or less of client participation.

Do PSCs actually solve problems?

Yes. According to the National Drug Court Institute, more than 80 percent of persons charged with a crime in the U.S. misuse illicit drugs or alcohol.²⁶ Drug courts were created to improve outcomes for persons charged with drug-related offenses.²⁷ At least nine studies concluded that the average *reduction* in recidivism averaged from 6 to 26 percent, depending on the study.²⁸ “The best adult drug courts were determined to reduce recidivism by 35 percent to 80 percent.”²⁹ Additionally, PSCs have been found to be very cost-effective for government. A study completed by the Multisite Adult Drug Court Evaluation found that adult drug courts netted savings for local communities of approximately \$3,000 to \$22,000 per participant.³⁰ PSCs provide a path forward for clients who have a proven overall reduction in recidivism—leading to theoretically healthier clients and government savings.

The future

Possible expansion of veterans treatment court eligibility. By 2018, the U.S. saw nearly 500 veterans treatment courts.³¹ Veterans courts are distinct from other PSCs in that they are deeply rooted in identity and often address social and medical needs³² with additional unique

ACCORDING TO THE ILLINOIS CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION AUTHORITY, AS OF 2017, THERE WERE 3,000 PSCs NATIONWIDE AND 116 PSCs IN ILLINOIS. IN COOK COUNTY ALONE, EIGHT TYPES OF PSCs WITH TREATMENT COURTS ARE PROVIDED FOR DRUG-, MENTAL HEALTH-, AND VETERANS-RELATED DEFENDANTS IN EACH OF ITS SIX DISTRICTS.

18. This table was compiled over the span of July 2021–March 2022, after the author attempted to make contact with all 102 counties in Illinois. The information provided was given directly to the author via email, phone contact, and information provided on the respective county’s website. Information from nonresponsive counties or those that did not have accessible online information was excluded. It is not meant to imply that a PSC is not operational in a specific county. Please refer to Figure 2 on page 36 for that information. A complete contact list for PSCs in Illinois can be found at law.isba.org/3RWt4b1 but may not reflect the correct contact for referrals.

19. Bill Chappell, *Drug Overdoses Killed a Record Number of Americans in 2020, Jumping by Nearly 30 Percent*, NPR (July 14, 2021), law.isba.org/3Psd3rB.

20. *Id.*

21. Email from Kelly Gallivan-Illaraza, director of the Cook County Problem-Solving Courts to Professor Becky Walters, Background on Problem Solving Courts during the Pandemic (Sept. 17, 2021, 11:42 AM) (copy on file with Professor Walters).

22. Illinois Supreme Court, In re: Illinois Courts Response to COVID-19 Emergency/Impact on Trials, M.R. 30370 (Apr. 7, 2020).

23. Emily Anderson, “It’s Going to Be Nuts”: Rock Island County Courts Facing 33,000 Open Cases With Looming Deadline for Trials to Resume, The Dispatch (Sep. 2, 2021), law.isba.org/3B7crvd.

24. Carlos Ballesteros, *Court Backlog Leaves Hundreds of People in Cook County Jail for More Than a Year*, Injustice Watch (April 28, 2021), law.isba.org/3p2yaAA.

25. Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, *Telehealth for the Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders*, SAMHSA Publication No. PEP21-06-02-001 Rockville, MD (2021).

26. Douglas B. Marlow, et al., *Painting the Current Picture: A National Report on Drug Courts and Other Problem-Solving Courts in the United States*, National Drug Court Institute, 14 (June 2016), law.isba.org/3RRFKjf.

27. *Id.* at 15.

28. *Id.* at 15-16.

29. *Id.* at 15.

30. *Id.*

31. Jamie Rowen, *Worthy of Justice: A Veterans Treatment Court in Practice*, 42 Law & Policy 1, 78–100 (Jan. 2020).

32. *Id.*

Figure 1: Referral procedure for problem-solving courts by county

	Contact and process information	Courts Available
Adams	Director of Court Services, Anthony Foster, afoster@co.adams.il.us, 217-277-2181.	Drug, mental health
Boone	Submit Drug Court Referral form to drug court coordinator, 815-544-9806 (P), 815-547-8267 (F); or drop by the office.	Drug, first offender
Cass	Send requests for alternative resolution to statesattorney@co.cass.il.us.	
Champaign	Complete a request for Drug Court assessment, give to the assigned assistant state's attorney.	Drug
Clay	Obtain the referral form from probation, complete it, and give to state's attorney.	Drug, mental health, veterans (combined with Effingham and Jasper)
Coles	Defense attorney makes oral request to judge to order a drug court evaluation.	Drug (combined with Cumberland County)
Cook	sao.diversionreferrals@cookcountyil.gov.	Drug (RAP & ACT), mental health, veterans, deferred prosecution "Branch 9"; RJCC, DDPP, SEED
Crawford	Contact state's attorney at 618-546-1505, complete application.	Drug
Cumberland	See Coles County.	
DeKalb	Contact court coordinator.	Drug & DUI, mental health
DuPage	Complete an application court order with defense attorney and file it in the case's original courtroom. saomicapdrugcourt@dupageco.org.	Drug, MICAP (mental health), Veterans, First Offender Call Unified for Success (FOCUS)
Edwards	Complete and present referral form to drug court officer and state's attorney (Second Circuit Coordinated Drug Court Program Preadmittance Procedure).	Drug
Effingham	Obtain the referral form from probation, complete, give to state's attorney. Defense counsel files a written referral to state's attorney.	Drug, mental health, veterans (combined with Clay and Jasper counties)
Franklin	Complete the referral form, present to drug court officer and state's attorney (Second Circuit Coordinated Drug Court Program Preadmittance Procedure).	Drug
Grundy	Case Management Coordinator Diana Beams dbeams@grundyc.org.	Drug, mental health
Hancock	Obtain referral form from the public defender, submit to the drug court board.	Drug
Hamilton	Complete referral form, present to the drug court officer and state's attorney (Second Circuit Coordinated Drug Court Program Preadmittance Procedure).	Drug
Henderson	Defense attorney informs state's attorney; drug court team screens case.	Drug (in Warren County)
Jackson	618-687-7200.	Drug
Jasper	State's Attorney Chad Miller, 618-783-3115.	Drug, mental health, veteran (combined with Clay & Effingham counties)
Jersey	State's Attorney Ben Goetten 618-498-5571 ext. 147.	Drug
Jefferson	Complete referral form, present to drug court officer and state's Attorney (Second Circuit Coordinated Drug Court Program Preadmittance Procedure).	Drug
Kane	Program Director Michelle Halbesma, 630-232-3500.	Drug, solicitation & prostitution, domestic violence, deferred prosecution
Kankakee	Court Coordinator Karen Smietanski, ksmietanski@k3county.net, 815-937-8489.	Drug, Veteran's
Kendall	Specialty Court Coordinator Melissa Moore, 630-553-4208.	Drug, mental health, veterans
Knox	Send referrals to Drug Court Officer Leah Painter (309) 345-6701; deferred prosecution requests screened by electronic software system. State's attorney approves diversion.	Drug, deferred prosecution
LaSalle	Complete referral form, provide to PSC coordinator.	Drug, mental health
Lee	Make referral to Lee County State's Attorney's Office.	Drug, Second Chance Program
Lake	Chief of Rehabilitative Services Kevin Malia, Lake County State's Attorney's Office, KMalia@lakecountyil.gov.	Drug, mental health, veterans alternative prosecution program
Livingston	Drug court: Defense attorney completes, submits Adult Drug Court Referral Packet; Defense Attorney completes, submits IT Court Referral Packet. Drug Court & Intensive Treatment (IT) Mental Health Court Coordinator Jessica Brzys, jbrzys@livgov.com, 517.540.7260. Veterans court: Defense attorney completes, submits Veterans Treatment Court Referral Packet. Veterans Treatment Court Coordinator Kelly Meade, kmeade@livgov.com, 517.540.7619.	Drug, intensive treatment court (itc) (mental health), veterans

Lawrence	Complete referral form, submit to drug court officer and state's attorney (Second Circuit Coordinated Drug Court Program Preadmittance Procedure).	Drug
Macon	Hybrid/Mental Health: Offers made by the state's attorney as a plea agreement. Adult Diversion/Deferred Prosecution: state's attorney reviews & coordinator offers.	Hybrid, mental health; adult diversion & deferred prosecution
Macoupin	Complete referral form provided by the state's attorney or court services.	Drug & work with neighboring counties for veterans and mental health
Madison	Defendants or family members refer themselves to the probation department's problem-solving court office. Attorneys complete form motion, fax screening form to 618-692-8984.	Drug, mental health, veterans, redeploy
Marion	Complete form and efile with clerk. File is given to probation.	Drug
Marshall	State's attorney Pat Murphy, 62mcsa@gmail.com.	
McHenry	specialtycourtferrals@22ndcircuit.illinoiscourts.gov.	Drug, mental health, veterans, deferred prosecution
McLean	Problem-Solving Court coordinator 309-888-5653.	Drug Court, recovery (mental health court), veterans, misdemeanor deferred prosecution.
Mercer	Defense makes request to judge to transfer case.	Drug court in Rock Island
Morgan	State's Attorney Gray Noll (217) 243-5469.	
Peoria	Referral to the Peoria County State's Attorney's Office. If eligible, state's attorney refers to probation.	Drug, mental health, veterans
Perry	Fill out form. Must be completed by defense attorney, the probation department, law enforcement, the prosecutor, or even a family member.	Drug (combined with Washington County)
Putnam	State's Attorney Christina Judd Mennie, pcsa@mchsi.com.	
Richland	Complete application, submit to drug court team.	Drug
Rock Island	Referral via email to the public defender, prosecutor who handles mental health court, or prosecutor assigned to the case to request a defendant be screened for eligibility. The referral can be made by probation officers, judges, prosecutors, defendants, defense attorneys, and family members.	Drug, mental health, veterans
Saline	Contact assistant state's attorney (ASA) assigned to case. ASA will help facilitate application.	
Sangamon	Complete referral form.	Drug, mental health, veterans
Shelby	Complete and submit form to probation.	Drug
Stephenson	An individual or their attorney must complete the required referral forms & submit to drug court coordinator, 815-235-8319.	Drug
Wabash	Complete and submit form to drug court judge.	Drug
Wayne	Complete referral form and present to drug court officer and state's attorney (Second Circuit Coordinated Drug Court Program Preadmittance Procedure).	Drug
Warren	Application by defense is submitted to court services. Applications are often, though not always, preceded by informal discussion between defense counsel and the Warren County State's Attorney's Office with suggestions for drug court candidates originating from either the state or defense. Defendant has a right to apply to drug court without any prior discussion, request, agreement, or permission.	Drug (any mental health or veterans court requests likely accommodated by a nearby county)
Washington	Begin form to be completed by the defense attorney, the probation department, law enforcement, prosecutor, or family member. Submit to the program officer. Reviewed by state's attorney.	Drug (combined with Perry County)
White	Complete drug court referral form found in law library, submit to probation.	Drug
Will	jhilderbrand@willcountyillinois.com.	Drug, mental health, veterans
Williamson	Assistant state's attorney.	Drug
Winnebago	Deputy Administrator of Problem-Solving Courts Emily Behnke, ebehnke@17thcircuit.illinoiscourts.gov.	Drug, mental health (TIP), veterans
Woodford	Decided at the time of charging.	Deferred prosecution, veterans

resources and services through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Services for veterans in the Veterans Treatment program in Cook County include outpatient and inpatient treatment, yoga, and pet therapy. Services specifically tailored to the individual veteran are also provided. The veteran's family also is often involved, encouraged to attend every court date, provided court updates on the veteran's progress, invited to celebrate progress, and be informed of setbacks.

As a member of the Cook County Veterans Treatment Court Team, I often thought this must be taxing on family members of the participant. Legislation introduced into the General Assembly during the spring session would have made veterans court more inclusive and expanded eligibility to include the families of veterans, but the bill failed to come to a committee vote.³³

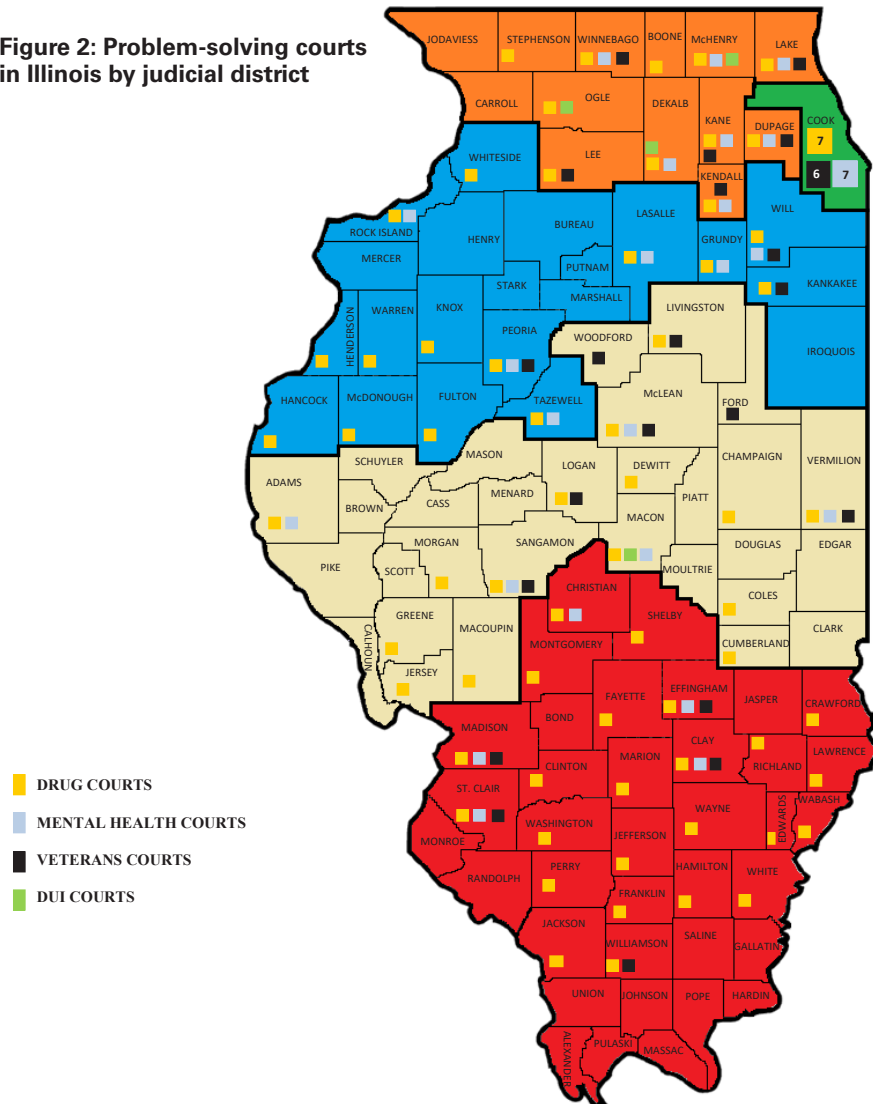
On July 15, 2021, Public Act 102-0100 took effect and aims to boost the effectiveness of restorative justice courts by prohibiting the use of anything said or done in the restorative justice process in civil, criminal, or juvenile proceedings.³⁴ Bill sponsor Sen. Robert Peters (D-Chicago) states, "Restorative justice can't work if people are afraid to use it. These practices are an important and effective alternative for responding to crime, and if we don't work to shore up their effectiveness, then we're back to square one."³⁵

Fresh start with expungements. Not only can the PSCs help your client reach an equitable resolution in a criminal case, but the outcome following successful completion can be optimal for participants. For example, the drug court statute states:

(b) Upon successful completion of the terms and conditions of the program, the court may dismiss the original charges against the defendant or successfully terminate the defendant's sentence or otherwise discharge him or her from any further proceedings against him or her in the original prosecution.³⁶

Some courts in Cook County have interpreted this to mean that the court has the authority to vacate the original

Figure 2: Problem-solving courts in Illinois by judicial district



Source: Illinoiscourts.gov. Updated July 2022.

judgment against the participant upon successful completion. Furthermore, the participant can truly realize a fresh start by expunging the arrest and conviction from their record all together. Barriers to loans, employment, and certain professional licenses due to a conviction will no longer stand in their way. Legal Aid Chicago, Cabrini Green, and many other organizations offer expungement and life-improvement services to indigent clients. Higher education institutions are also creating clinics that assist with

expungements. The South Suburban College (SSC) Paralegal Program in South Holland and Illinois State University (ISU) offer two such clinics. The SSC Expungement Clinic works in partnership with Legal Aid Chicago, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, and the Law Office

33. Senate Bill 2092, 102nd General Assem., 2021 Sess.

34. 735 ILCS 5/804.5.

35. Illinois Senate Democrats, *Series of New Peters Law Focus on Safety, Justice for Communities* (July 15, 2021), law.isba.org/3yXkLTD.

36. Veterans Treatment Court, 730 ILCS 166/30(b); Mental Health Court, 730 ILCS 168/20(b); Drug Court, 730 ILCS 166/20(a).

of the Public Defender to expunge cases of participants who successfully complete drug, mental health, or veterans court. The SSC Expungement Clinic offers a service-learning opportunity for paralegal students and improves the quality of life of the communities it serves. In fall 2020, the ISU Department of Politics and Government, in cooperation with the Bloomington office of Prairie State Legal Services, began operating an expungement clinic to provide hands-on legal experience to legal studies students by assisting low-

income individuals seeking to expunge and seal old criminal records. The clinic gives these clients access to employment, rental, and lending opportunities necessary for moving forward with their lives. This civic engagement project also instills in future legal professionals the importance of *pro bono* service.³⁷

Conclusion

Problem-solving courts have a growing presence in the Illinois criminal justice system. They can be a valuable resource and option for those accused of nonviolent

criminal offenses and are suffering from an addiction, mental health issue, or simply in need of a second chance. My sincere hope is that this article sheds light on how those who are willing can receive the help of the criminal justice system so that true celebrations can begin. ■

37. Email from Professor Thomas McClure, professor, prelaw advisor, and director of legal studies at Illinois State University to Professor Becky Walters, on *Mention in ISBA Lincoln Writing Contest* (Sept. 29, 2021, 2:47 PM) (copy on file with Professor Walters).