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FOURTH CIRCUIT EXCELS IN COURT USER SURVEY RESULTS

Fourth Circuit Chief Judge Michael D. McHaney has announced the release of the results of a court user survey that measured public perceptions and experiences with trial courts across the state. Overall, the results show that court users have a very positive view of the courts in Illinois with the Fourth Circuit doing better than the state average overall.

“My fellow Judges and I are pleased to find out that so many of our court users have a good opinion of our judicial system in the Fourth Circuit” Chief Judge McHaney said.

The recommendation to conduct a survey designed to evaluate the perception and experience of court users came out of the Supreme Court’s Future of the Courts Conference in 2013. The Strategic Planning Committee of the Illinois Judicial Conference, in coordination with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and under the Supreme Court’s leadership, developed the survey.

“The Judges of the Fourth Circuit want to thank all of those who helped the court by conducting the survey and all those individuals who took the time to answer the survey questions” McHaney said.

The Survey was distributed to court users in every circuit courthouse in Illinois between about April 13, 2015 and May 1, 2015. The chief judges of the 24 Circuits were provided with the surveys and instructions. Each county was assigned a minimum number of surveys to collect based on the volume of court filings there.

More than 12,300 completed surveys were returned to the AOIC and analyzed by faculty and students at Loyola University Chicago. The survey was composed of two sections of positively phrased statements about the court system and a third section that required respondents to provide background information, including age, gender, race, income, education, what they did at the courthouse that day, how often they go to the courthouse, and if they live in an urban, suburban, or rural area.

The first section of statements was designed to gauge court users’ general perception of the courts. The second section was made up of statements to be completed only by respondents who were in a courtroom that day as it aimed to measure court users’ experiences in court. Survey respondents were asked to use a scale of one to five to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements.

No circuit received an average response to any of the survey questions that was below three (a neutral response) and no circuit had a majority of users indicating negative views to any of the questions. In the Fourth Circuit, 88.8% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The way my case was handled today was fair” compared to

76.5% in the state overall. The judges are perhaps most satisfied with the responses to the statement “I was treated with courtesy and respect by the judge.” 92.5% of those surveyed in the Fourth Circuit agreed or strongly agreed, while 82.6% of the state overall agreed or strongly agreed. Participants were asked whether they strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree, with a total of 31 statements such as “Judges follow the law”, “I was treated with courtesy and respect by the court security staff”, “I was treated the same as everyone else”, “Courts are open at convenient times”, “The courthouse was easy to find”, “The forms I needed were available”, “Court started on time”. Results for the Fourth Circuit were strong for all questions.

Although the court users surveyed overall had positive views and experiences with Illinois trial courts, the results demonstrate that certain background characteristics were related to respondents’ perception of trust in the court system, assessment of the quality of the courts, and their overall opinion.

“While my fellow judges and I are pleased with the results of this survey, we should note that we continue to work every day to make sure that our court system is fair, efficient and accessible for all” Chief Judge McHaney said.

The Fourth Judicial Circuit is made up of the counties of Christian, Clay, Clinton, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Marion, Montgomery and Shelby.

The statewide results of the survey can be viewed on the Illinois Supreme Court’s website at www.illinoiscourts.gov.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CHIEF JUDGE’S OFFICE, at 618-283-2030