**Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Board**

**Name:** Dorothy Brown

**District running for:** Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County

**Political party:** Democratic

**Political/civic background:**

* Chair – Cook County Integrated Criminal Justice Information Systems Committee
* Board Member and Board Secretary – COGIC Charities, Incorporated (National) (2002 to Present)
* Board Member (Trustee) – King of Glory COGIC (1997 to Present)
* Board Member – First Jurisdiction of Illinois, COGIC, Incorporated
* Board Member – Moriah Community Development Corporation
* Board Member – Citizen’s Action Illinois (2003 to Present)
* Past Chair – State of Black Chicago Summit, 2013
* Past Chair – Illinois Integrated Justice Information Systems Implementation Board
* Past Treasurer – Working in the School, Chicago Public Schools
* Founder and Chairman – Dorothy Brown Scholarship & Community Development Fund
* Past Board Member – Jobs For Youth, Chicago
* Past Board Member – First Jurisdiction Bible College (1998-2005)
* Past Board Member – Illinois CPA Society (2003 – 2005)
* Member – NAACP
* Member – Operation PUSH
* Member – National Association of Black Accountants
* Member - Chicago Bar Association
* Member - Cook County Bar Association
* Member - Black Women Lawyers Association
* Member - Delta Sigma Theta Sorority
* Member - King of Glory Tabernacle Church of God in Christ.

**Occupation:** Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County

**Education:**

* Chicago-Kent College of Law, Juris Doctorate, 1995
* DePaul University, Master of Business Administration – Finance, 1981
* Certified Public Accountant, February 1977
* Southern University, Bachelor’s Degree – Accounting/Computer Science, Baton Rouge, LA, 1975

**Campaign website:** www.friendsofdorothybrown.org

**Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Board questionnaire responses**

**Q) *Why is the Cook County Circuit Court Clerk so far behind in making electronic filing available, compared with other court systems?  What is your plan to get the office up to date?***

A) E-filing is already available and is one of the biggest accomplishments in the Clerk’s Office. You may go onto [www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org](http://www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org) and start to e-file today. In September 2002, the Illinois Supreme Court approved e-filing of civil case court documents as a pilot program. Under my leadership, Cook County was one of the five original counties selected to pilot e-filing. The other 4 counties were Du Page, Madison, St. Clair, and Will Counties. The Supreme Court approved e-filing for all 102 counties in Illinois, based on the success of the pilot programs. As of October 2014, Cook County was one of 11 Illinois counties that had permission from the Supreme Court to electronically file all civil cases. The other counties are DeKalb, Du Page, Kendall, Lake, Madison, McHenry, Montgomery, Moultrie, St. Clair, and Sangamon.

Working with local bar associations and other parties, the Clerk’s Office has implemented e-filing in all civil case type areas except the County Division, and implementation in that division is about 70% done. The County Division has a different case management system from the other divisions and required programming from the vendor. E-filing is available in the Chancery, Child Support, Civil, Domestic Relations, Law and Probate Divisions, pursuant to the Circuit Court of Cook County’s General Administrative Order No. 2013-07, Electronic Filing (e-filing) of Court Documents. As of October 2015, more than 250,000 filings have been processed and more than 41,000 motions have been spindled. E-filing is available 24/7 and new users have access to 24 hour online webinars.

As of October 2015, there were more than 29,500 registered users of e-filing. Most registered users are attorneys. They represent a majority of the potential pool of attorneys in Cook County. As of October 2013, there were 45,306 active and inactive attorneys registered in the First Judicial District (Cook County) of Illinois.[[1]](#footnote-2) I will continue to promote the availability of e-filing and increase the number of registered users for civil cases.

Under my leadership, the Clerk’s Office has partnered with 25 law enforcement agencies to automate the transfer of traffic-stop citation from the squad cars directly to the Clerk’s Office. As of October 2015, more than 56,000 e-tickets have been filed and more than 48,000 warnings have been processed. I will continue to partner with suburban agencies to expand the number of participating municipalities on this initiative.

Under my leadership, the Clerk’s Office has developed and implemented *E-plea*, an online traffic ticket system that has enabled plaintiffs and defendants to conduct business successfully without having to come to the courthouse. As of October 2015,

* more than 108,00 customers have been able to enter guilty pleas;
* more than 163,000 requests for Traffic Safety School have been processed; and
* litigants have made more than 31,000 court hearing requests.

I will continue to promote and expand these electronic records services for traffic cases.

On September 16, 2014, the Illinois Supreme Court amended its rules to permit e-filing in criminal and traffic cases. Until then, only civil cases could be e-filed in the Circuit Courts. To implement criminal case e-filing, the Chief Judges and the Clerks of the Circuit Courts in Illinois must engage local bar association(s), state's attorney(s), and public defender(s) in the planning and development process for criminal case types. The planning process for implementing e-filing in criminal and traffic is already underway.

A *mittimus* is one of the most important documents produced by a judge in criminal cases. The document authorizes the Sheriff to take a defendant into custody upon completion of a court hearing. Under my leadership, the Clerk’s Office has produced and transmitted electronic mittimuses to the Cook County Department of Corrections and the Illinois Department of Corrections. As of October 2015, more than 61,000 electronic mitts have been transmitted, which has helped to expedite processing of prisoners and improve public safety. I will upgrade this vital service as needed.

As chair of the Cook County Integrated Criminal Justice Information Systems Committee (CCICJIS), I am proud to have led the long and complex effort to integrate communication systems between justice agencies. In December 2015, the Cook County Board approved purchase of an Enterprise Service Bus (ESB) to facilitate communications between software applications used by the Chief Judge, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Public Defender, Sheriff, State’s Attorney and the Bureau of Technology. As chair of the CCICJIS Committee, I will diligently oversee implementation of this critical piece of integrated technology in the coming months.

**Q) *Lawyers complain court files are often incomplete and that sometimes there are two or three separate files on a particular case because files are being misplaced. How would you resolve this problem?***

A) I long ago recognized the challenges in ensuring the completeness of court files. Since court files are public and must be made available to anyone, this makes the content of files vulnerable to being stolen or destroyed. I determined that the only way to ensure complete records are always available is through having documents electronically filed, or immediately imaged in the case of paper filings. These are reasons why I worked hard to get the funds to implement the Imaging and Document Management system (IDMS). Through this system, lawyers can see the complete file of the images and judges can view the complete file of the case on the computers on their benches, thus having no need to continue a case because of a missing file.

This system enables the Clerk’s Office to image every document that is filed over the counter, thus enabling the Clerk’s Office to produce another copy of the document as needed. The imaged document is inserted into the electronic docket to create a seamless web of complete information about a court case. With this system, the judiciary, the attorneys, parties to a case and the public all have access to digital images of court documents. In 2015, I installed a new and easy searching capability for the electronic docket and images.

We currently have almost200 million electronic images of court records through both the Imaging and Document Management System (IDMS) and the Electronic Filing System (e-filing). These documents can already be viewed online on the digital access terminals at the courthouses, in accordance with the Illinois Supreme Court Public Access Policy.

The Clerk’s Office has the related technology that could permit single electronic records of individual court cases tube shown on the internet. In order to do so, the Clerk’s Office needs:

* A local court rule authorizing the Office to show the images to attorney of record for a case and the party to the case (Currently have a request in to the Chief Judge to issue this rule); and
* A special exemption from the Electronic Access Policy of the Illinois Supreme Court, to show images to attorneys who are not of record to a case.

I will continue to lobby for these changes.

Please note however, if both parties to a case electronically files their case, and opt in for electronic service, then each party can have access to the images for the entire case in our system as it exist now.

**Q) *What will you do to improve the accuracy of court files?***

A) The Circuit Court Clerk’s Office handles over 100 million pieces of paper a year, serves over 5.2 million Cook County residents, and has almost 1.5 million new cases a year. The Clerks' Offices in Du Page, Will, and Lake counties serve 900,000, 700,000, and 600,000 residents, and have about 310,000, 223,000, and 175,000 cases filed a year respectively. The numbers of cases handled by these counties represent only one division of the Cook County Clerk’s Office.

I long ago recognized the challenges in ensuring the accuracy of court files. When I first took Office, one of my first innovations was to hire a records management professional to oversee the improvement of record keeping practices in the Clerk’s Office. The newly created Records Management Bureau holds regular meetings with all File Room managers in all divisions to review file maintenance procedures, proper filing techniques, and retrieval practices. These meetings have helped to create a sense of pride and ownership in work product among File Room staff and reinforced the importance of maintaining complete and accurate hard copy case files.

The Clerk’s Office’s electronic records management initiatives—Imaging and Document Management System and E-filing—have and will continue to improve the accuracy of case files.

* + Under the IDMS system, as soon as documents are filed they are data entered and digitized, and then the images appear in the electronic docket. Therefore, the actual document filed by the attorneys and pro se customers, or orders rendered by the judge, are available on the electronic docket, thus ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the files.
	+ With e-filing, attorneys and pro se customers have direct control over the documents they submit. The information is uploaded into the Clerk’s Office’s electronic docket. E-filing has eliminated the need for clerks to data enter information from the document directly into the computer, thus reducing the chance that information is omitted, transposed or otherwise entered incorrectly.

**Q) *In some places around the country, the clerk of the Circuit Court is an employee of the chief’s judge’s office rather than an independently elected official. In the interest of efficiency, would you support such a system in Cook County?***

A)  *The Clerk of the Circuit Court should remain an independent, elected official.* This will continue to ensure the independence of court clerks and the neutrality of the Clerk’s Office in the judicial system. The State Court is the court of first impressions. In other words, this is where the case is first heard and it is important that the record is properly maintained and preserved to ensure proper justice. This Office should not be accountable to anyone but the people. There are too many ways that a party to a case could be disadvantaged if records were unfairly handled.

By remaining independent, the Clerk’s Office can control the process of assigning clerks to court rooms and maintain the integrity of the court records. I have followed a policy of rotating court clerks in and out of specific courtrooms. This helps individual clerks maintain their independence from the judiciary and to concentrate on the mission of the Clerk’s Office: to maintain and keep accurate and complete court records. Furthermore, as a matter of sound internal control, the judiciary should not be responsible for both entering orders and recording and storing those orders. The judiciary would be able to change the document at will if they had responsibility for maintaining court records.

**Q) *Last fall, FBI agents seized the incumbent clerk’s government-issued cell phone and later served a subpoena on her and her husband for documents. However this inquiry turns out, what would you do to improve the office's ethical standards and public image****?*

A) In my 15 years in office, the ethical standards have always been at the highest level. I believe the incident of last fall was political or retaliatory in nature. As a public figure, I cannot control a person making false accusations. I had no problem with giving the agents my cell phone because I have nothing to hide. Please note that I have since received my cell phone back.

I will continue to ensure that the Clerk’s Office is operated with the highest of integrity in all aspects, especially hiring, promotions and vendor selections. I have and will continue to encourage the public to report any wrongdoing in the Clerk’s Office. The public and employees can file a complaint online by visiting the Office of the Inspector General at [www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org](http://www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org). Complaints should be filed if there is evidence of fraud, waste, mismanagement, abuse, sexual harassment, harassment, theft, workplace violence or any other misconduct by employees of the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, or if there is evidence of wrongdoing in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court itself.

 **Q) *What will you do to reassure taxpayers that patronage hiring and firing will not take place in the future****?*

A) I do not support patronage in hiring and promoting public employees. My philosophy is professionalism over politics; therefore, I have hired and promoted individuals because of their qualifications and not their political patronage connections. Patronage has no place in hiring and promoting public employees. Under my administration, we strictly adhere to the Shakman for both union hiring and promotions, and hire based on qualifications for management. A large percentage of both management and union positions in my office are from prior administrations. That is because I am more interested in whether or not a person is qualified to get the job done versus their political affiliations.

**Q) *What do you see as the core function of the office?***

A) The core function of the Office has been, and will always be, recordkeeping. The mission of the Office is to ensure that all recordkeeping services are timely, accurate and complete. I will continue improving the efficiency of court case management from case initiation to disposition. To improve case management, I will increase automation capacity, update existing management processes and promote 100% user acceptance of existing green technology. I will:

* Purchase a state-of-the-art case management system that will be integrated with other justice agencies. The system will provide justice partners with upgraded management reports, permit general electronic filing for both attorneys and individuals, permit attorneys to file electronic draft orders and motions directly with judges, as well as permit judges to review orders and motions and rule on them electronically. The new case management system will speed up the administration of justice.
* Work with the judiciary to make all courtrooms e-courtrooms. This would enable judges, attorneys, parties to cases, and jurors to see electronic images of documents, evidence and exhibits on large screens and computers. There would be computers on all attorney desks, and there will be a portable electronic podium for permitting attorneys to see images while standing in front of the judge.
* Expand the Interactive Order System (IOS). Currently in a pilot phase, IOS allows judges to enter court orders directly into a computer to produce dispositions for the Clerk’s electronic docket and various official court documents, such as half-sheets, bonding and warrant documents and agency draft orders.
* Continue to work with the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County to issue a general administrative order for a subscription service to permit attorneys of record and pro se customers to view their own cases over the Internet.
* Request that the Illinois Supreme Court:

(1) make the electronic record the official court record. This will permit court cases to move forward expeditiously because there would not be any papers to process.

(2) change the Electronic Access Policy and permit registered attorneys to access Clerk’s Office’s electronic images over the Internet. This would be similar to what is already being done in Du Page County.

**Q) *In what ways to you plan to make the office more transparent?***

A)I have implemented an aggressive informational outreach program that has made the Clerk’s Office’s operations and services more transparent, as described below.

* Customers have quick access to the following services at the website at [www.cookcountyclerofcourt.org](http://www.cookcountyclerofcourt.org).
* Clerk Office email alerts sign up
* E-File training class registration
* E-File your court case
* E-Filing training webinar
* File a complaint with the Inspector General
* Free email case monitoring service
* Get attorney code/electronic case management notice sign-up
* Naturalization Declarations of Intention search
* Online electronic case docket search
* Pay ticket/Traffic Safety School/Request a Court Date
* Prepare Orders of Protection using Smart Forms
* Unclaimed child support check search
* About $21 million in mortgage foreclosure surplus funds sit in an interest-bearing account maintained by the Clerk's Office. I directed my technology staff to develop a searchable database of the available surpluses on foreclosed properties, which is available online at www.cookcountyclerkofcourt.com.
* Since 2005, the Clerk’s Office has hosted an annual County-wide Expungement Summit to help eligible individuals clear their criminal records. More than 12,000 ex-offenders have participated in the Summits. The Expungement summits have proven successful and have led to community-based expungement seminars. In 2015, the Clerk's Office co-hosted or participated in expungement seminars in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago and other locales.
* More than 800 fillable forms are now available on the Internet.
* As a service to the community, I have updated, published, and distributed to community outlets a variety of brochures pertinent to the Clerk’s Office, designed to inform the public of available services and justice issues, including:
	+ A Descriptive Guide to the Clerk’s Office,
	+ Domestic Violence Guidelines for Help,
	+ How About Child Support,
	+ A Descriptive Guide to the Juvenile Justice division, and
	+ Archives.
* Since 2004, the Clerk’s Office has hosted a half-hour call-in TV show over CAN-TV (Chicago Access Network) on specific topics related to the administration of the Office. Topics have included how to apply for an expungement, complete an order of protection, and housing court.

I will continue to promote and expand these initiatives to meet public demand and ensure the transparency of the Clerk’s Office.

1. Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission, Annual Report of 2013, Chart 4: Registered Active and Inactive Attorneys by County for 2012-2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)