

2018 Budget Hearing Statement
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Department of Administrative Hearings
Friday, November 3, 2017

Good Morning Chairman Austin and members of the City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today about the Department of Administrative Hearings (DOAH), what we have achieved this year, and what we plan to accomplish in 2018.

The mission of DOAH is to provide quality administrative hearings for the City in a timely and efficient manner, with respect for the dignity of individuals and their due process rights. DOAH is an independent entity that hears cases relating to violations of the Municipal Code, the Chicago Park District Code, and the Chicago Transit Authority Code. The Department maintains an exceptionally high level of service to the public. We have accomplished this through cross-training personnel and employing various efficiencies.

The Department hires and trains outside attorneys to adjudicate cases and serve as Administrative Law Judges. As of 9/30/17, these Administrative Law Judges have presided over 447,375 hearings this year. The Department hears cases under four categories: Buildings, Municipal, Environmental Safety/Consumer Affairs, and Vehicles.

The Department also remains committed to assisting *pro se*, or “self-represented,” litigants to effectively navigate the administrative hearing process. The help desk at the Central Hearing Facility, which is staffed and independently operated by attorneys from the Coordinated Advice & Referral Program for Legal Services -- known as CARPLS -- is open four days a week. CARPLS is a non-profit legal aid service that provides low-income clients direct access to experienced attorneys through legal aid hotlines and court-based help desks. The help desk provides support to these *pro se* litigants by educating them about their legal rights and remedies, providing them with practical “how to” advice to present their side of the case, and providing assistance in preparing motions. As CARPLS attorneys have become more experienced in a wider variety of municipal code violations, the services provided by the help desk have expanded to almost every type of violation adjudicated by DOAH. The help desk, which is jointly funded by the City and the Chicago Bar Foundation, assisted 1,611 low-income respondents from 7/1/16 through 6/30/17.

A second source of assistance for respondents continues to be provided by the Telephone Language Line Interpretation Service, known as the “Language Line.” This service is available for respondents whose first language is not English. All the hearing rooms at the Central Hearing Facility and neighborhood hearing sites provide access to Language Line interpreters. This service enables respondents to understand and fully participate in the administrative hearing process by providing ready telephone access to interpreters who are skilled in more than 170 languages. The average time to connect

to an interpreter is under one minute. This service also promotes efficiency by eliminating the need for continuances caused by the absence of an interpreter. It also minimizes the inconvenience to non-English speaking respondents who might otherwise need to rely on the schedules of family members or friends to serve as interpreters.

The Language Line service is also available at DOAH information desks at all of its facilities through the use of dual handset telephones. In this way, both our customer service staff and the non-English speaking respondent are able to more effectively communicate once they are connected to the interpreter. As of 9/30/17, there were 29,375 minutes of interpretation service in thirty-five (35) different languages.

Quality training for staff and Administrative Law Judges continues to be a key component to our successful operation. Since 2007, DOAH has been certified annually by the Illinois Supreme Court's Continuing Legal Education Board--known as the MCLE Board--to provide mandatory continuing legal education to our Administrative Law Judges. Certification by the MCLE Board must be supported by a proven track record and this certification validates the quality of the Department's past and present training program.

On March 21/22 and June 27/28, 2017, DoAH department members, Administrative Law Judges, courthouse security personnel, City prosecutors, representatives from various enforcement departments and outside counsel attended a training session entitled "Walk in their shoes; Courthouse Professionalism Training." DoAH invited the Illinois Supreme Court's Commission on Professionalism to present this program, which challenged participants to consider the administration of justice from the perspective of the patron/customer/respondents who appear at DoAH.

The Commission on Professionalism's representatives presented the results of a 2015 Statewide Illinois Supreme Court Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts' court user survey results showing how to develop better listening skills in serving the public and working with their colleagues.

After the presentation, attendees broke into discussion groups which contained representatives from various departments. During these small groups sessions, participants discussed professionalism challenges and possible solutions to those challenges. The participants then convened again for a large group debrief. Each small group shared the issues they discussed and ideas for improvement. Before they left, everyone was asked to make a commitment going forward: "What I learned today that I want to incorporate into my workday beginning tomorrow."

While the commission has presented this program in Circuit Courts throughout the State, this is the first time that an Administrative Hearings courthouse received the training.

One hundred forty-nine (149) participants attended the civility training program at DoAH. It is anticipated that these participants will use the customer service skills/tips they learned during this training during all future interactions with the public and their colleagues.

I would also like to highlight an ongoing customer service initiative which became operational at DOAH in 2016 and has been substantially used by the public in 2017.

In January 2016, the new 'E-request' website went live at DOAH. This upgrade provides more convenient methods to request an in-person hearing and contest vehicle violations. In the past, in-person hearing requests could only be requested by U.S. Mail, via phone call, or by personally delivering a written request to one of the payment or hearing locations; and 'contest-by-mail' (CBM) hearings could only be requested and conducted by U.S. Mail or by personally delivering documentation (including evidence) to DOAH. On average, DOAH adjudicates 150,000 CBM hearings annually, and all CBM documents must be manually scanned upon receipt. The new 'E-request' website enhances customer service by allowing vehicle owners to request an in-person hearing via the website or to contest tickets by uploading and submitting their supporting documents via the website. This E-request enhancement substantially reduces the manual scanning of documents received by U.S. Mail. In 2016, 73,385 respondents used the new E-request service, and as of September 30, 2017, 88,558 respondents used this customer service enhancement.

DOAH remains committed to achieving the Department's core mission in 2018 – providing a forum for fair and impartial adjudication; maintaining an exceptionally high level of courteous, respectful and prompt customer service for the public; and responding effectively to the needs of the enforcing departments and respondents.

Thank you.