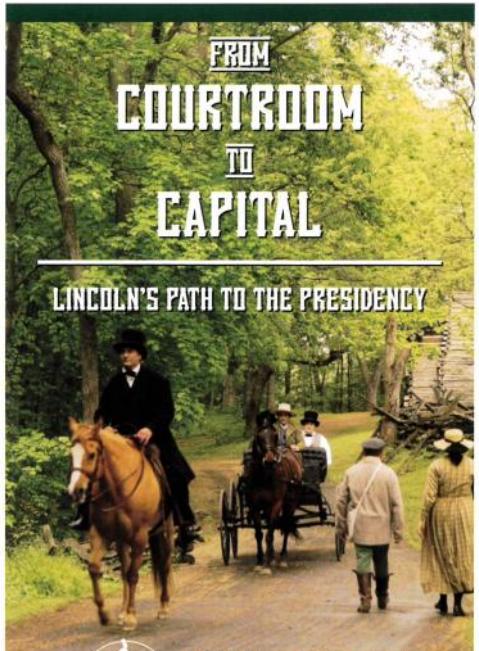


# Annual Report

## 2025

Illinois Supreme Court  
Historic Preservation Commission

# 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



A new documentary on Lincoln's legal career featured John Lupton. Samuel Wheeler served in an advisory capacity.



Digitization of Illinois Supreme Court case files continues at the Illinois State Archives.



The Commission continues to manage increased numbers of tours at the Supreme Court Building.



Jason Blohm and Kathryn Powell attend the American Institute for Conservation conference in Minneapolis, MN.

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Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission  
231 South Sixth Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62701  
217-670-0890  
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# ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

231 South Sixth Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701 ◊ Tel: 217-670-0890 Fax: 217-670-0944  
[www.IllinoisCourtHistory.org](http://www.IllinoisCourtHistory.org)

January 13, 2026

Hon. P. Scott Neville Jr., Chief Justice  
Supreme Court of Illinois  
200 East Capitol Avenue  
Springfield, IL 62701

Hon. JB Pritzker, Governor  
State of Illinois  
207 Capitol Building  
Springfield, IL 62706-1150

Hon. Don Harmon, President  
Illinois Senate  
327 Capitol Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

Hon. Emanuel “Chris” Welch, Speaker  
Illinois House of Representatives  
300 Capitol Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

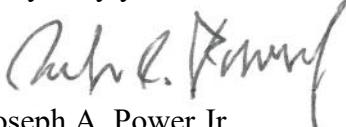
Dear Chief Justice Neville, Governor Pritzker, President Harmon, and Speaker Welch:

Enclosed is the Annual Report of the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission (Commission) filed in accordance with Section 25 of the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Act (705 ILCS 17). The Annual Report reflects the activities undertaken by the Commission in calendar year 2025 to further its mission as articulated in the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Act.

The Commission continues to fulfill its mission of preserving the history of the judicial branch. Most notably, the efforts to digitize Illinois Supreme Court case files from 1818 to 1865 and to conserve Illinois Supreme Court case files from 1870 to the present consume much of the staff time. The digitization project should be fully published in the upcoming year and will provide a massive new resource to the legal and historical professions. Staff of the Commission are frequently sought to speak before civic, legal, and historical groups to share their knowledge of the Illinois courts. In addition, Commission-led tours of the Supreme Court Building grew significantly. Lastly, the Commission continued to assist the Illinois Supreme Court with its “Riding the Circuit” outreach program. In 2025, the Court met at Southern Illinois University Carbondale with nearly 800 people in attendance for two oral arguments.

The Commission prides itself on being an efficient state agency with minimal expenditures while providing a great service to Illinoisans who are interested in the cultural history of the state through the lens of its legal system.

Very truly yours,

  
Joseph A. Power Jr.  
Chair

# MISSION

The Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission was created in 2007 by an Act of the General Assembly (705 ILCS 17) to:

assist and advise the [Illinois Supreme] Court in regard to the acquisition, collection, documentation, preservation, cataloging, and related matters with respect to historic aspects of buildings, objects, artifacts, documents, and information, regardless of form, relating to the Illinois judiciary.



The Presumption of Freedom: The Illinois Supreme Court and the Fate of Slavery in the Prairie State

**The Supreme Court heard oral arguments at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale before a record crowd of nearly 800. The Commission assists the Court in organizing the Riding the Circuit program.**



**Illinois State Bar Association president Sonni Choi Williams presents a reproduction of a Supreme Court Building mural to South Korea's High Court Judge Jiyong Jang. The Commission produces the reproduction murals.**

# SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

## Supreme Court Building Tours

The Commission organizes and leads tours of the Beaux-Arts style Illinois Supreme Court Building in Springfield. Of note, the staff led tours of the building for nearly a dozen high schools that were in Springfield for the state mock trial competition. Overall, tours have increased by 62% from the previous year.



Students look at the controversial case display in the Learning Center.



Samuel Wheeler explains the purpose and history of the Attorneys Room.



Samuel Wheeler provides a background of the Illinois legal system to a group tour.



Students from Pittsfield High School model the John McClarey bust of Abraham Lincoln.

## Praise for Supreme Court Building Tours

- “We visited the state capitol, IL Supreme Court, Lincoln’s Museum, & Lincoln’s Tomb. Highlight of the trip was the tour of the IL Supreme Court building with two awesome state historians.”
- “Thank you again for coordinating this morning’s tour of the Supreme Court Building—it was an incredible experience!”
- “The Supreme Court tours continue to be one of our most talked about and well-received offerings.”



- “The experience was both insightful and memorable, and we greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the Court’s history, operations, and significance within the state’s judicial system.”
- “Thank you for the tour and unique experience.”

- “What a surprise and honor to be introduced to the Illinois Supreme Court environs and history by such an illustrious scholar of the Court!”
- “Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge. We could feel your passion for the history of the Court.”
- “We could have listened to many more fascinating tales of the characters and history of the court.”
- “What a fabulous building with a rich and fascinating history! Keep doing what you are doing because it is fabulous!”

The public is invited to visit the Illinois Supreme Court Building during its Monday through Friday hours of 8:30 am - 4:00 pm. For larger groups, reservations are necessary. For more information, please contact Samuel Wheeler at 217-670-0890 or [samuel.wheeler@illinoiscourthistory.org](mailto:samuel.wheeler@illinoiscourthistory.org).

## Digitization Project

The Commission continues to build on the work funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission grant. The \$135,000 award provided resources for technicians to scan 3,720 case files consisting of 103,590 images from 1818 to 1865.

Once the grant completed in 2024, Shanta Thoele remained on contract to scan approximately 3,800 in-scope case files that were uncovered during the grant period. The Commission also hired University of Illinois Springfield interns Hunter Hocking, Joy Brown, and Katherine Blessing to assist Thoele in scanning. The four technicians had previously used flat-bed scanners. In 2025, the Commission purchased two CZUR overhead scanners. What used to take 30 seconds to scan a page now takes about 3 seconds. This has increased productivity significantly. In one year's time, technicians have scanned an additional 2,514 case files consisting of 136,933 images. This brings the total number of images scanned to 240,523 images from 6,284 case files.

The Commission also received volunteer assistance from Justine Newman and Samantha Misch to review case summaries. We continue to seek volunteers to assist with this herculean task.

While the cases are now available on the Commission's website, the search engine is still being refined.



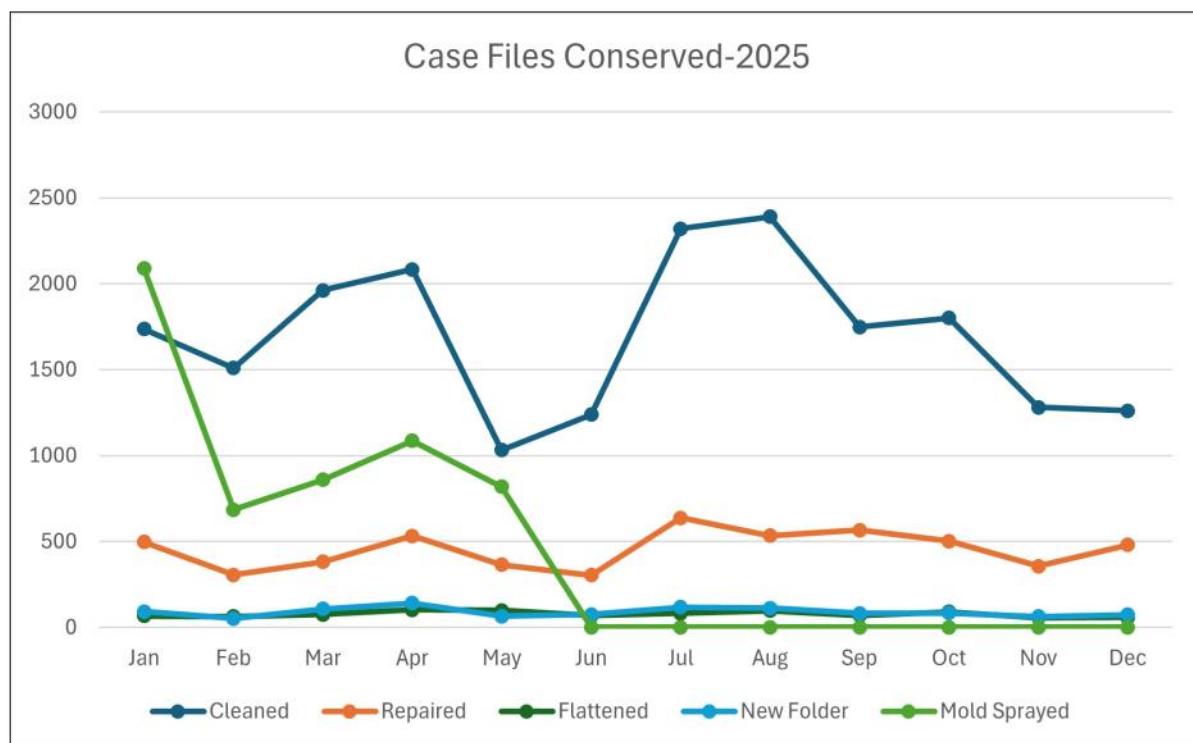
NATIONAL HISTORICAL  
PUBLICATIONS  
& RECORDS COMMISSION

Shanta Thoele scans documents on an Epson flat-bed scanner (left) and demonstrates the new CZUR scanner (right) to Cindy Grant and staff of the Supreme Court Clerk and to Kara McCaffrey and staff of the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts.



## Supreme Court Case File Conservation

The conservation of Supreme Court case files is one of the most important projects the Commission is undertaking. Case files that have been trifolded need special attention to hydrate, flat-file, repair, clean, and deacidify documents within them. Commission conservators Jason Blohm and Kathryn Powell work at the Illinois State Archives Building, where the case files are housed.



# OUTREACH

## Public Presentations

Commission staff made more than 55 presentations for various civic, educational, bar, and historical organizations.

- Samuel Wheeler was a speaker at the Jim Edgar Fellows Program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.
- John Lupton spoke at a Gilder-Lehrman teachers institute.
- Wheeler was one of the main presenters for 5 separate Lincoln Land Community College Road Scholar programs. Lupton also spoke at the Road Scholar programs.
- Wheeler was a featured speaker at the Adams County Historical Society.
- Lupton participated in a panel discussion at The Lincoln Forum in Gettysburg.
- In a webinar, Lupton and Wheeler discussed the Illinois Supreme Court's slavery related cases for Looking for Lincoln.
- Lupton and Wheeler gave presentations at the 7th Annual Lincoln Legal Legacy MCLE program. This was the first year that the Commission sponsored this event.
- Wheeler gave numerous presentations across the state on the Supreme Court's role in ending slavery in Illinois.
- Commission staff led more than 65 tours of the Illinois Supreme Court Building.



John Lupton speaks to a group of students from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Samuel Wheeler speaks at the Lincoln Legal Legacy Lecture at the McLean County History Museum.

## Lincoln Legal Legacy Program

The Commission and the Illinois State Bar Association, with funding from the Jerome Mirza Foundation, sponsored the 7th annual Lincoln Legal Legacy Program. This program was begun by retired Christian County judge Ron Spears, who wanted an MCLE program on lessons that modern lawyers can learn from Abraham Lincoln's law practice. The program's annual date coincides with the anniversary of Lincoln receiving his law license (September 9, 1836).

This year's program on Lincoln and Medicine was held at the McLean County History Museum (formerly the courthouse). Retired attorney and Lincoln author Guy Fraker spoke on Lincoln's medical malpractice cases. Samuel Wheeler spoke on Abraham Lincoln's melancholy. Dr. Diana Uchiyama from the Illinois Lawyers Assistance Program followed up with ILAP resources that can benefit today's lawyers dealing with depression or substance abuse. John Lupton spoke on the medical malpractice environment of the 19th century. Melissa Smart from the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission relayed information about ARDC to help attorneys. Lastly, retired judge Raymond McCoski spoke about Abraham Lincoln's and David Davis's professional relationship.

Attendees received 6 hours of MCLE credit, including 3 hours of Professional and 2 hours of Mental Health credit. The ISBA has several of the talks online to obtain MCLE credit:

<https://www.isba.org/cle/path?pathPage=/isba/courses/116125>

[https://www.isba.org/cle/path?pathPage=/isba/courses/116127.](https://www.isba.org/cle/path?pathPage=/isba/courses/116127)

Next year's program will be on September 10, 2026 in Chicago and will focus on the legal and constitutional issues Lincoln dealt with as a lawyer and as president. This program will be a part of the USA250 commemorations.



From Top: Ray McKoski, Samuel Wheeler, Guy Fraker, and John Lupton speak at the Lincoln and Medicine MCLE program .

## Publications

The Supreme Court Communications Office publishes *Illinois Courts Connect*, an online monthly newsletter that provides information about the judicial branch to the public. The Commission contributes an article for each issue highlighting the history of the Court. Articles written by Commission staff in 2025 can be found at <https://www.illinoiscourthistory.org/courts-connect>.

### Illinois Courts Connect articles in 2025

January: Wrigley Field	July: James Shields
February: Riding the Circuit	August: Lincoln Home Preservation
March: Florence Kelley	September: Medical Malpractice
April: Cairo and the Supreme Court	October: Chief Justices
May: Border Battles	November: Divorce—One Year Rule
June: Lyman Trumbull	December: French Law in Illinois

## Collections

Benjamin Belzer, the Commission's part-time Collections Manager, continued responsibility for managing the archival collection. The Commission received several new donations in 2025, including a Supreme Court marshal's automobile badge from the 1940s and an oral history of retired appellate court justice Warren Wolfson. The largest donation came from the estate of former supreme court justice Benjamin K. Miller. His collection consists of more than 60 archival boxes, ranging from speeches, campaign posters, the Pontiac prison riot case, papers related to John Wayne Gacy's execution, as well as numerous other documents and notes.

Left: Supreme Court Marshal Auto Badge

Right: Benjamin K. Miller Collection



## Website & Social Media

Matt Burns, Director of Administration, managed the Commission's website and social media presence. New Director of Administration Karen Everingham will assume this responsibility with Burns' retirement. The social media outlets are primarily used to make announcements and to direct users to the website, where more detailed information is available. Samuel Wheeler and John Lupton have LinkedIn pages that also promote the Commission's work.

Website: [www.illinoiscourthistory.org](http://www.illinoiscourthistory.org)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/judicialhistory/>

X (Twitter): <https://x.com/judicialhistory>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-lupton-69ab9535/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/spwheeler/>

## Information Source and Impact

Commission staff traveled for professional development, exhibitions, and workshops. Commission staff continues to serve as a source of information for historians, students, authors, archivists, and the legal profession.

- In February, John Lupton visited the Fifth District Appellate Courthouse in Mt. Vernon to give recommendations on document storage.
- In March, Jason Blohm and Kathryn Powell attended a book conservation workshop at the University of Chicago.
- In April, Samuel Wheeler attended the Lincoln Forum Hildene Mini-Symposium in Vermont. Wheeler serves as the editor for the *Lincoln Forum Bulletin*, a semi-annual publication.
- In May, Blohm and Powell attended the American Institute for Conservation conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where they learned about paper repair and mold safety.
- In September, Matt Burns and Lupton visited the Second District Appellate Courthouse in Elgin to assist with architectural information about the courthouse.
- In September, Lupton attended the Illinois Democracy Schools Conference to promote the Commission's educational resources to teachers.
- In October, Virginia Geiger attended the Conference on Illinois History to provide information about the Commission to attendees.
- In November, Wheeler and Lupton participated in the premiere of "From Courtroom to Capital: Lincoln's Path to the Presidency." The documentary traces the development of Lincoln's legal career and how it influenced his presidency.
- In November, Wheeler and Lupton attended The Lincoln Forum Conference in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.
- In December, Lupton visited the Missouri Supreme Court's new Discovery Center in Jefferson City, Missouri, and provided suggestions on how best to utilize its space.



Kathryn Powell, Illinois State Archives Conservator Bill Lear, and Jason Blohm attend a workshop at the University of Chicago.



John Lupton meets with Hawaii Supreme Court justice Lisa M. Ginoza (above) and a teacher (below) at the Illinois Democracy Conference.



John Lupton meets with Missouri Supreme Court justice Mary R. Russell (above) and examines displays at the Missouri Supreme Court Discovery Center (right).





John Lupton appeared in a documentary on Lincoln's legal career. At the premiere event, Samuel Wheeler moderated a panel discussion featuring Guy Fraker, Lupton, and filmmaker Kevin Christensen.



Watch the documentary!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_Y8NuY4iZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_Y8NuY4iZE)



Appellate Court Clerk Courtney Kuntze, Illinois State Archives Conservator Alex Dixon, and John Lupton examine old docket books.



Virginia Geiger talks to a guest at the Conference on Illinois History.

# ADMINISTRATIVE Commissioners

Joseph A. Power Jr., Chair  
Hon. Vincent F. Cornelius  
Hon. Kirk W. Dillard  
J. Martin Green  
Thomas Q. Keefe  
J. William Roberts  
John “Jay” Rock  
Dr. David M. Sokol  
Marcia M. Meis, *ex officio*, Director,  
Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts



*Joseph A. Power Jr.*

## Supreme Court of Illinois Liaison

In November 2025, Justice Lisa Holder White became the Commission’s liaison to the Illinois Supreme Court. She succeeded Justice Joy V. Cunningham, who served as liaison since 2022.



*Hon. Lisa Holder White*

## Associate Commissioners

The Associate Commissioners serve as the operational body, in support of the Commission, which serves as the governing body. Associate Commissioners attend meetings and provide input into the Commission’s programmatic activities.

Hon. Anne M. Burke (ret.), Emerita  
Hon. Rita B. Garman (ret.), Emerita  
Matthew R. Carter  
Hon. Neil H. Cohen  
Hon. Margarita Kulys-Hoffman (ret.)  
Hon. Margaret McBride  
Hon. Aurelia Pucinski  
Scott J. Szala



*Hon. Joy V. Cunningham*

## Meetings

The Commission met four times in 2025 as required by statute on March 7, June 6, September 12, and December 5. Meeting agendas and minutes are available upon request to the Executive Director.



Commission staff front row Virginia Geiger, Karen Everingham, Kathryn Powell, Shanta Thoele, and Katherine Blessing; back row John Lupton, Sam Wheeler, Ben Belzer, Jason Blohm, and Matt Burns

## 2025 Staff

Benjamin Belzer, Collections, Oral History, and Research

Katherine Blessing, Center for Lincoln Studies Intern, 2025-26

Jason Blohm, Conservator

Joy Brown, Center for Lincoln Studies Intern, Summer 2025

Matt Burns, Director of Administration (retired December 2025)

Karen Everingham, Director of Administration (effective December 2025)

Virginia Geiger, Administrative Assistant

Hunter Hocking, Graduate Public Service Intern, 2024-25

John Lupton, Executive Director

Kathryn Powell, Conservator

Shanta Thoele, Research Technician

Samuel Wheeler, Ph.D., Director of History Programs

Matt Burns retired in December 2025. Burns had been with the Commission since its inception in 2009 and was pivotal in establishing our website, network server, and other technical considerations. When he became Director of Administration in 2011, he assumed significant administrative duties and a whole host of “duties as assigned.” The Commission would not be what it is today without Burns’ vision and input, and he will definitely be missed.

Karen Everingham was hired in December 2025 to succeed Burns. Everingham has a background in history and administration with a B.A. in History and an M.A. in Public Administration. She worked for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for many years before moving to the Illinois State Museum in 2014. Her experience will allow for a seamless transition in this important role for the Commission.

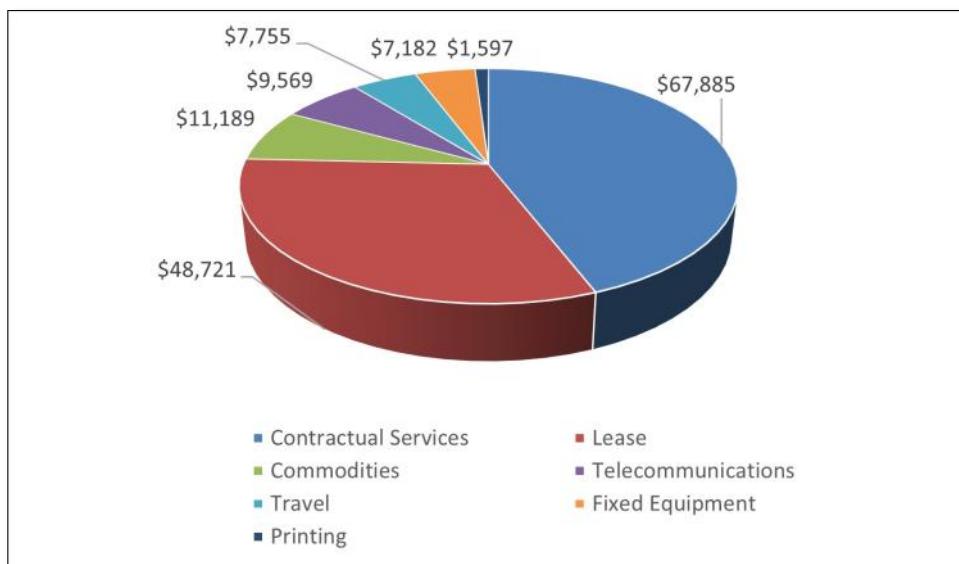
# FISCAL SUMMARY

In FY2025, the Commission increased its expenditures by 9 percent from the previous fiscal year. This was principally due to regular position increases and additional purchases of commodities and equipment for the continued work on digitizing Supreme Court case files from 1818 to 1865. The Commission expects to maintain level expenditures in the near future.

## FY25 Expenditure Detail (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>
<i>Regular Positions</i>	\$538,701
<i>Benefits</i>	\$487,418
<i>Contractual Services</i>	\$67,885
<i>Lease</i>	\$48,721
<i>Commodities</i>	\$11,189
<i>Telecommunications</i>	\$9,569
<i>Travel</i>	\$7,755
<i>Fixed Equipment</i>	\$7,182
<i>Printing</i>	\$1,597
<i>Total</i>	\$1,180,017

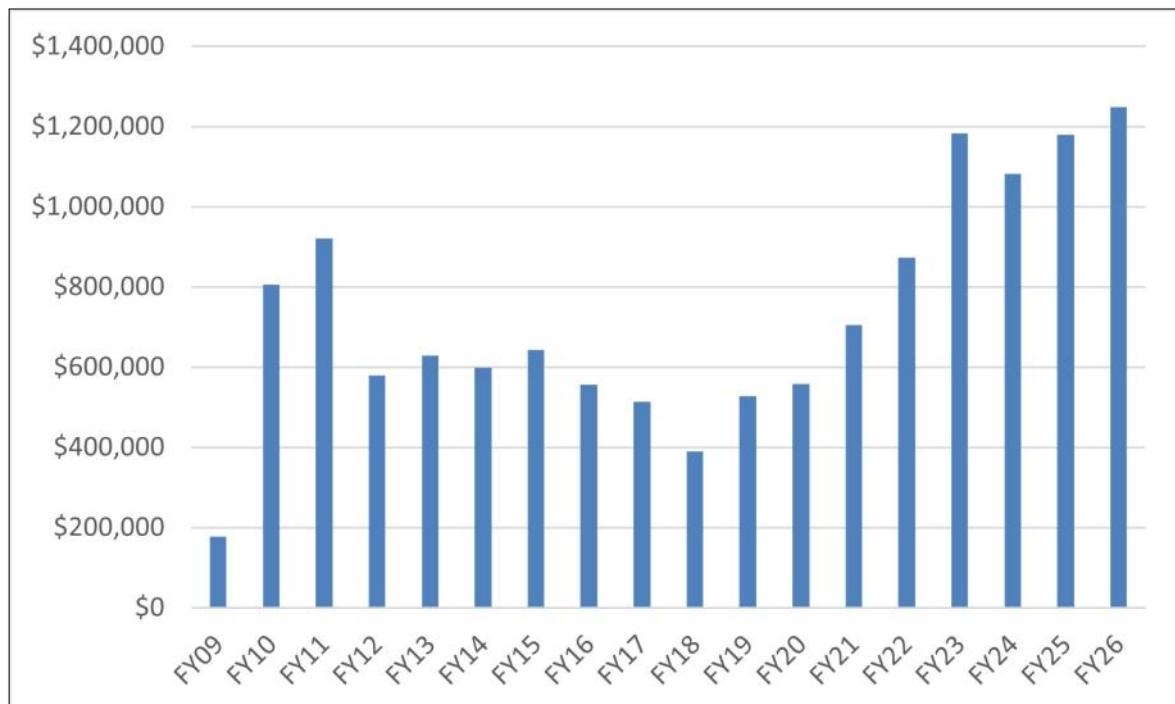
## FY25 Expenditures (minus personal services)



## Appropriations and Expenditures Supreme Court Historic Preservation Fund

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Appropriation</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>2010</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$805,400	354.3%
<b>2011</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$919,800	14.2%
<b>2012</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$579,300	-37.0%
<b>2013</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$628,800	8.5%
<b>2014</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$598,100	-4.9%
<b>2015</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$643,100	7.5%
<b>2016</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$556,100	-13.5%
<b>2017</b>	\$10,000,000	0%	\$514,300	-7.5%
<b>2018</b>	\$4,500,000	-55%	\$390,000	-24.2%
<b>2019</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$526,800	35.1%
<b>2020</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$557,000	5.7%
<b>2021</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$703,859	26.4%
<b>2022</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$872,510	24.0%
<b>2023</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$1,182,519	35.5%
<b>2024</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$1,081,548	-9.1%
<b>2025</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$1,180,017	9.1%
<b>2026</b>	\$4,500,000	0%	\$1,248,000 (est.)	5.8%

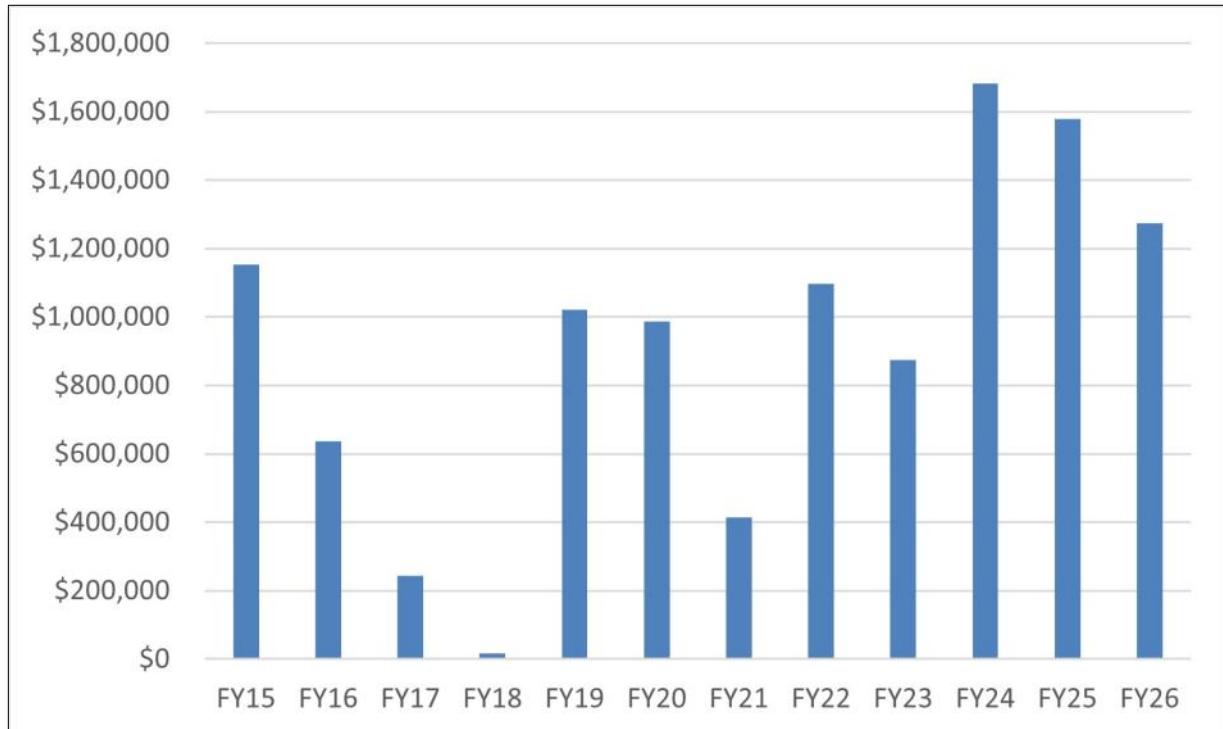
### Expenditures by Fiscal Year



## Cash Balance Supreme Court Historic Preservation Fund

Date	Amount
December 31, 2010 (FY11)	\$3,929,711
December 31, 2011 (FY12)	\$3,207,802
December 31, 2012 (FY13)	\$2,568,486
December 31, 2013 (FY14)	\$1,749,061
December 31, 2014 (FY15)	\$1,152,920
December 31, 2015 (FY16)	\$636,960
December 31, 2016 (FY17)	\$243,347
December 31, 2017 (FY18)	\$17,057
December 31, 2018 (FY19)	\$1,021,695
December 31, 2019 (FY20)	\$986,463
December 31, 2020 (FY21)	\$415,337
December 31, 2021 (FY22)	\$1,096,622
December 31, 2022 (FY23)	\$874,654
December 31, 2023 (FY24)	\$1,682,299
December 31, 2024 (FY25)	\$1,579,611
December 31, 2025 (FY26)	\$1,273,463

### Cash Balance by Fiscal Year





## LOOKING AHEAD

For 2026, the Commission continues to plan for activities and events.

- Organizing the Supreme Court’s “Riding the Circuit” program
- Managing tours of the Supreme Court Building
- Managing webinars and in-person talks to reach new and diverse audiences
- Managing the ISBA MCLE program on Abraham Lincoln’s Legal Legacy
- Continuing work on conserving Supreme Court case files
- Applying for additional sources of funding
- Expanding the collections of the Commission
- Publishing new material on Illinois judicial history
- Working with circuit clerks statewide to digitize historic case files
- Continuing to digitize case files and publishing them on its website



Illustration Credits:

Cover: Supreme Court Courtroom (1908—present) in the Illinois Supreme Court Building in Springfield, Illinois

All photos courtesy of Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission with the exception of  
P. 3: SIU oral arguments courtesy of Supreme Court of Illinois

P. 3: Mural courtesy of Illinois State Bar Association

P. 3: Illinois Supreme Court and Slavery courtesy of Looking for Lincoln

P. 8: Lupton courtesy of University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

P. 8: Wheeler courtesy of Illinois State Bar Association

P. 9: All photos courtesy of Illinois State Bar Association

P. 13: Film Premiere and Lupton screen shot courtesy of Looking for Lincoln

P. 14: Joseph A. Power Jr., courtesy of Power Rogers

P. 14: Lisa Holder White and Joy V. Cunningham courtesy of Supreme Court of Illinois

Printed by the Authority of the State of Illinois

HPC2604—.1M—01/2026

