

In the Iowa Supreme Court

**In the Matter of Establishing an
Iowa Judicial Branch Court
Navigators Task Force**

Order

The Iowa Supreme Court establishes the Iowa Judicial Branch Court Navigators Pilot Project Task Force. The Court Navigators Task Force is charged with implementing a court navigators pilot project for Iowa with a target initial location in Clinton County. The Court Navigators Task Force will establish an operational program on or before March 1, 2025. The task force will provide a progress report to the supreme court during the court's 2024 Administrative Term.

Court navigators are an increasingly utilized resource for alleviating access to justice barriers for court users who cannot afford or do not have attorney services. Court navigators are nonattorney individuals trained to answer questions and provide legal information to guide self-represented litigants through the judicial process. Court navigators do not provide legal advice and are not judicial branch employees. At least 24 states operate or are planning court navigator programs, numbering at least 40 operational or planned projects in total.

According to the 2023 Report of the Iowa Access to Justice Commission, which recommended to the supreme court that the judicial branch establish a pilot court navigator program, court navigators can assist people who do not have attorneys in many ways, including:

- Providing legal information
- Explaining court rules and procedure
- Referring parties to pertinent court forms, manuals, and guides
- Offering information on how to find and fill out court forms correctly
- Providing technology support
- Connecting with language assistance
- Giving referrals for additional help
- Providing information on a litigant's case—for example, providing a printed copy of the chronological case summary and the date of the next hearing

The Court Navigators Task Force is also charged with considering how best to leverage existing judicial branch resources to establish the pilot program, including a focus on remote technology as a means to expand court navigator services beyond the initial pilot site in Clinton.

The court appoints the following persons to serve on the Task Force:

Mark Cleve, Senior Judge, 7th Judicial District of Iowa

Danny Davis, District Court Administrator, 7th Judicial District of Iowa

Timothy Eckley, Assistant Counsel to the Chief Justice, *ex officio*

Kim Hess, Clerk of District Court, Clinton and Jackson Counties (retired)

Brian Farrell, University of Iowa College of Law Assoc. Prof. of Instruction; Director, Citizen Lawyer Program; Assoc. Director, Center for Human Rights

Dustria Relph, Judge, 5th Judicial District of Iowa

Celeste Robbins, Community Program Monitor, Clinton County Resource Center

Diana Ronk, Business Analyst, Judicial Branch IT

Kelly Ruhnke, Clerk of District Court, Marion County

Virginia Sipes, Innovation and Community Outreach Director of The Iowa State Bar Association


Molly Weber, Legal Counsel to State Court Administrator, *Task Force Chair*

Jennifer Webster, Assistant District Court Administrator, 5th Judicial District of Iowa

Task Force members may be reimbursed for necessary and reasonable travel expenses according to Iowa Court Rules 22.16 through 22.21.

Dated this 12th day of February, 2024.

The Iowa Supreme Court

By: 

Susan Larson Christensen, Chief Justice