

2025 Budget Hearing Statement

Patricia Jackowiak, Commissioner/Chief Administrative Law Judge

Department of Administrative Hearings

December 3, 2024

Good morning, Chairman Ervin, Vice Chairman Lee and members of the City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and update you on the Department of Administrative Hearings (DOAH).

DOAH strives to provide the highest level of customer service to those who appear at our Courthouses. As such, several customer service modifications which were made during COVID-19 still continue at DOAH. These modifications ensure Respondents have easier access to the Administrative Hearings process. For example, Respondents can file motions to set-aside default judgments online. Previously, these motions could only be filed in person. Also, those who have pending Building code violations can email photos, receipts, paid invoices, permits and a sworn statement attesting to full compliance. If the property owner is in compliance, the Law Department transmits a request to non-suit the case.

DOAH also continues to offer virtual hearings as an option. In 2023, there were 14,112 virtual hearings conducted for parking, speed and red-light camera cases. This represented 24% of the total in-person vehicle hearings conducted in 2023. As of October 31, 2024, DOAH conducted 11,567 virtual vehicle hearings, representing 25% of the total in-person vehicle hearings. Virtual hearings are also available for other DOAH case types. In non-parking cases, Respondents log into their assigned Courtroom and are connected with a City representative for a pre-trial conference. Subsequent to that conference, the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) will enter the hearing.

The Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services (CARPLS) which staffed a virtual advice desk during Covid returned to on-site consultations in June 2023. They assist Respondents Monday through Thursday at 400 West Superior. CARPLS also has a dedicated phoneline for Respondents who have matters pending at our two (2) satellite hearing locations. DOAH posted additional signage and distributed CARPLS contact cards at these 2 locations to ensure that Respondents are aware of CARPLS services. CARPLS provides practical "how to" advice to Respondents in presenting their defenses to the alleged violations and in preparing any applicable motions. The legal help desk also promotes equal access and understanding of the Administrative Hearings process for Respondents who are self-represented litigants at DOAH.

DOAH also utilizes Language Line translation services to ensure that those whose first language is not English can fully participate in their Administrative Hearings. The top four (4) languages for 2024 are Spanish, Russian, Mandarin and Polish. Language line offers

translation services in one hundred seventy (170) languages/dialects. In 2023 there were 2178 calls, resulting in 24,815 minutes of interpretation. As of October 31, 2024, there were 2899 call with 28,440 interpretation minutes.

DOAH remains committed to achieving its core mission in 2025 – providing a forum for fair and impartial adjudication, maintaining an exceptionally high level of courteous, respectful, and prompt customer service for the public. In furtherance of this mission, DOAH in collaboration with the Department of Technology and Innovation redesigned its web page to greatly enhance functionality and the user's ability to navigate through hearing related information. One of the most significant changes went live on November 20th, 2024, and now allows the public to submit their comment cards online. This provides for "real time" notice to DOAH and allows for prompt responses to any concerns or issues.

In August 2006, DOAH accepted its first electronic case filings (e-filing) for Department of Streets and Sanitation (DSS) violations. The e-filing system has been updated over the past eighteen (18) years with the intention of other enforcing Departments also being able to e-file their cases. On February 2, 2024, DOAH received the first e-filings for vacant property cases and on September 9, 2024, the Chicago Department of Transportation e-filed its first case. E-filing obviates the need for staff to manually review paper documents. All documents are now stored for review on DOAH's case management system.

DOAH's 2025 budget provides for continued funding for two (2) students to work year-round instead of only during the summer breaks. In 2024 these students gained experiences in the Courthouse and office environments. The interns also serve as DOAH's community engagement ambassadors as we strive to effectively and efficiently serve all who appear at DOAH.

DOAH remains committed to increasing the diversity of its ALJ Bench to reflect Chicago's current demographics. DOAH's Equity Racial Justice & Inclusion team have attended job/service fair, and the Illinois State Association's Annual Minority Bar Program to distribute the "Notice of ALJ Opportunity" flyer. Additionally, the ERJI team assembled a focus group of current ALJs to gather new ideas for recruitment and retention. One participant asked whether our Notice could be displayed on the City's website for open positions. In 2024, in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources (DHR), the Notice has now been included on DHR's "Job Flash". The ERJI team also wanted to be more proactive in its recruitment efforts. They will now personally distribute the Notice to law firms located in underrepresented communities in Chicago.

Thank you! We're here to assist with any questions you may have at this time.