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CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT


COMPLIANCE DEPARTMENT



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OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY

TO: Mariyana T. Spyropoulos, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County
Michael Ciaccio, Chief of Staff
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James Chandler, General Counsel
Katarina Durcova, Inspector General

FROM: Dana R. Andrews, Director of Compliance, (DOC) 

RE: July 2025 Semi-Annual Report

DATE: July 15, 2025

In accordance with Article V, Section B of the Employment Plan (the Plan) of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County (Clerk's Office), the following is the July 2025 Semi-Annual Report (Report).

This report details compliance – related activities between January 1, 2025 and June 30, 2025 and will be posted on the Clerk of the Circuit Court's website. The Clerk's Office continues to maintain substantial compliance, so long as the Clerk's Office acts in good faith to remedy instances of non-compliance that have been identified and prevent recurrences, does not make employment decisions based on political reasons or factors (except for Shakman Exempt positions), does not have a record of material noncompliance which frustrates the Consent Decrees and the Supplemental Relief Order's essential purpose, and has implemented procedures intended to effect long-term prevention of the use of impermissible political considerations in connection with employment.

The information contained herein provides insight into the processes that have been implemented and proposed recommendations to sustain continued compliance.

Mission Statement

The Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County strives to serve the public with excellence. Our goal is to provide efficient, transparent, and technologically advanced court services to all participants in the judicial system, ensuring an accurate and complete court record, strong financial stewardship, and equal access to justice for all. Our dedicated workforce reflects the diversity of our communities and is committed to delivering exceptional service and upholding the integrity of the judicial process.

JULY 2025 SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

Violations of the Plan

Violations of the Plan and/or Supplemental Policies Manual (SPM) were reported or discovered during this time period. They will be addressed specifically below. Additionally, the DOC received discrimination claims against 2 judges and Sheriff's Office staff which were forwarded to the Chief Judge's Office and the Cook County Sheriff's Office of Professional Review for resolution.

Unlawful Political Discrimination (UPD)

No complaints of UPD were filed or reported.

Political Contacts

Seven (7) political contacts were properly reported to the DOC. One (1) Cook County judge and 2 Cook County assistant state's attorneys reached out to the CHRO and Director of Labor Relations recommending reconsideration of a terminated employee. The investigation concluded that the political contacts were lawful; while the political contacts were meant to affect or influence an employment action, they were not based on political reasons or factors. Rather, the judge's and the attorneys' requests for reconsideration were based on their personal and direct knowledge of the employee's work, skill, experience, and job performance.

Additionally, a Cook County judge submitted a recommendation letter on behalf of a former employee who had applied for an Office Clerk position. The political contact was properly reported to the DOC and was considered to be a permitted recommendation under the Employment Plan. The judge referenced personal and direct knowledge of the respective candidate's work, skill, experience, and job performance. An Assistant Chief Deputy Clerk (ACDC) submitted 3 recommendation letters on behalf of various employees who applied for the Operations Manager position. The political contacts were properly reported to the DOC and were considered to be permitted recommendations under the Employment Plan. The ACDC referenced personal and direct knowledge of the respective candidates' work, skill, experience, and job performance.

Employment Plan Amendment

The Clerk's Office and the DOC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning the implementation of an interview process for the Entry Clerk positions (Office Clerk and Financial Clerk), as implemented under the Section VI. General Hiring Process of the Plan, to determine the most suitable candidates. Subsequently, the MOU was withdrawn and the Clerk's Office reverted to the Entry-Level Bargaining Unit Position Hiring Process as outlined in Section VII of the Plan.

- **Actively Recruited Positions List**

Senior Publication, Digital & Multimedia Coordinator position was removed from the list. Paralegal, Senior Server Administrator, and SQL Server Database Administrator were added to the list.

Employment Plan Training and Supplemental Policies Training

The Clerk's Office must provide comprehensive mandatory Employment Plan training to all employees, supervisors/interviews and Executive Staff, to ensure they are aware of and knowledgeable of the Plan as well as their role in the hiring process. Employees receive such training within 60 days of employment or promotion, and on an annual basis thereafter. From January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025, trainings were conducted both in-person and electronically, through the Learning Management System (LMS).

Sixty-two (62) new employees attended in-person Employment Plan and Supplemental Policies Manual Training during New Employee Orientation and 29 new supervisors and/or interviewers completed Supervisor/Interviewer Training.

Annual all-employee Employment Plan, Supplemental Policies Manual and Supervisor/Interviewer Trainings are delivered through LMS on an on-going basis.

Policies

Policies which were amended and approved during this time include the Telework Policy and Employee Handbook (and their respective forms). The Clerk's Office worked with the DOC to incorporate feedback and comments for the Telework policy, which has been implemented.

Audit Activities

- **Shakman Exempt Hiring Packet:**

During the previous reporting period, I conducted an audit of the Shakman Exempt Hiring Packets in the Electronic Application System ("EAS" or "Taleo") to ensure compliance with Section XII. Exempt Position Hiring Process of the Employment Plan and issued a Report, noting the following common issue:

1. Many employees did not have Taleo profiles or had incomplete Taleo profiles.

I recommended that HR follow their standard practices for uploading respective hiring documents into employees' profiles and instruct employees who did not have Taleo profiles to immediately create one. HR acknowledged my recommendations and uploaded applicable job descriptions, resumes, and applications into Taleo.

- **Executive Assistant Hiring Packet:**

During the previous reporting period, I conducted an audit of Executive Assistant Hiring Packets located in the Electronic Application System ("EAS" or "Taleo") to ensure compliance with Section XIII. Executive Assistant Hiring Process of the Employment Plan. The December 20, 2024 Report noted the following issues:

1. Some employees did not have Taleo profiles or had incomplete Taleo profiles; and
2. One (1) position was missing the Taleo requisition.

I recommended that HR create Taleo requisitions for all missing Executive Assistant titles, follow their standard practices for uploading respective hiring packets into employees' profiles and instruct employees who did not have Taleo profiles to immediately create one. HR acknowledged my recommendations and uploaded applicable hiring documents into Taleo.

- Posting File:

During this reporting period, I reviewed each posting file after completion of the hiring cycle. Thirty (30) areas on the Posting File/Interview File Checklist, tied to the hiring steps, were examined along with the required documentation that must be housed in each file. There were few issues with the files, many administrative in nature (e.g. failure to mark a check box on a form), no substantial issues to report.

Hiring & Employment Actions

Offering guidance on correct implementation of the Plan (and on how to address and/or resolve errors or other unexpected circumstances in a manner consistent with Plan principles) is a big part of what I do. I also observe (monitor) employment actions in progress to assess for compliance and assist management by providing direction and guidance as processes unfold. This prevents non-compliance in real time and serves as a form of training to prevent future non-compliance. Additionally, I monitor compliance with Plan requirements via review of documents. My practice is to recommend corrective measures and advise the HR staff appropriate to assist with corrections.

- Hiring

Section VI. B. Recruitment of the Plan provides that HR shall take steps to ensure that all employee recruitment efforts are conducted in a manner that maximizes the pool of Applicants and avoids any Unlawful Political Contacts or Unlawful Political Discrimination including, but not limited to, providing the Employee Recruitment and Hiring- Related Outreach Training described in Section IV..J. Employees involved in employee recruiting may participate in a variety of events including, but not limited to, job fairs, school sponsored campus recruitment events, and community-based employment and outreach program forums. The Clerk's Office shall provide prominent written notice at any such event to attendees that the Clerk's Office does not hire or accept recommendations for Non-Exempt Positions based on Political Reasons or Factors.

During this reporting period, the Clerk's Office participated in Cook County's inaugural Job Fair at the University of Illinois-Chicago and provided information to job seekers on opportunities available at the Clerk's Office and how to apply for such opportunities. There is no issue to report regarding the Clerk's Office's participation.

I recommend that the Clerk's Office consider a revision of the Plan to allow for added flexibility in the hiring process in filling high volume and/or high turnover vacancies through a hiring fair process.

*Actively Recruited Positions:*Paralegal

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the Actively Recruited Hiring Process. The DOC validated 72 applications and came to an agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 40 eligible candidates. The Application Review Panel reviewed candidate profiles and supporting documents and identified 10 candidates for interview. The interview process occurred without issue with the DOC monitoring 4 interviews. During the Ranking Meeting, the Interview Panel ranked 2 candidates. The top ranked candidate accepted the position. Subsequently, an additional vacancy was approved. The second highest ranked candidate accepted the position. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Senior Accountant

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the Actively Recruited Hiring Process. The DOC validated 34 applications and came to an agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 7 eligible candidates. The Application Review Panel reviewed candidate profiles and supporting documents and identified 6 candidates for interview. The interview process occurred without issue with the DOC monitoring 3 interviews. During the Ranking Meeting, the Interview Panel ranked 3 candidate(s). The top ranked candidate accepted the position. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Senior Publication, Digital & Multimedia Coordinator

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the Actively Recruited Hiring Process. The DOC validated 31 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 24 eligible candidates. The Application Review Panel reviewed candidate profiles and supporting documents and identified 7 candidates for interview. The interview process occurred without issue with the DOC monitoring 3 interviews. During the Ranking Meeting, the Interview Panel ranked 2 candidates. Prior to an offer being extended, the position was placed on hold pending the review of the position description by the newly hired Executive Clerk. Subsequently, under the direction of the newly hired Executive Clerk, the position was reclassified as Shakman Exempt to better suit the needs of the Clerk's Office. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Senior Server Administrator

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the Actively Recruited Hiring Process. The DOC validated 36 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validating resulting in 12 eligible candidates. The Application Review Panel reviewed candidate profiles and supporting documents; no candidates were identified for interview. Subsequently, the position requisition was cancelled and the position description was reviewed and revised by the hiring department. No issues were identified with this sequence.

SQL Server Database Administrator

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the Actively Recruited Hiring Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting and validated 27 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validating resulting in 10 eligible candidates. The Application Review Panel reviewed candidate profiles and supporting documents and identified 5 candidates for interview. The interview process occurred without issue with the DOC monitoring 2 interviews. During the Ranking Meeting, the Interview Panel ranked 1 candidate. The ranked candidate accepted the position. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Executive Assistant Hiring:

Three (3) Executive Assistants were appointed during this time period. HR submitted notifications for all Executive Assistants pursuant to Section XIII of the Plan. I did not identify any concerns with any of the selections.

Exempt Hiring:

Forty-eight (48) Shakman exempt employees were appointed during this time period, including: Executive Clerk, Chief Human Resources Officer; Executive Clerk, Court Operations and Administration; Executive Clerk, External Affairs; Executive Clerk Inspector General; Associate Clerk, Chief Technology Officer; Associate Clerk, Public Information Officer; Deputy General Counsel; Deputy Inspector General; Deputy Public Information Officer; Director of Scheduling and Advance; Facilities Management Project Manager; Labor Liaison Officer; Senior Administrative Assistant (28); Senior Security Investigator (2); Sr. Publication, Digital & Multimedia Content Coordinator; ACDC, Archives/Micrographics/Mailroom; ACDC, District 4: Maywood; ACDC, District 6: Markham; ACDC, Records Center.

HR submitted notifications for all Exempt hires pursuant to Section XII of the Plan. I did not identify any concerns with any of the selections.

General Hiring:

Accountant

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the General Hiring Process. This sequence should be addressed further in the next DOC's Report.

Accounts Payable Specialist

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the General Hiring Process. This sequence should be addressed further in the next DOC's Report.

Administrative Assistant IV

The position was properly posted with 3 vacancies under the General Hiring Process. Subsequently, the requisition was cancelled due to the reclassification of this position to the new title of Senior Administrative Assistant and designated as Shakman Exempt. All applicants received notice of the cancellation. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Auditor

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the General Hiring Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization. This sequence should be addressed further in the next DOC's Report.

Financial Clerk

The position was properly posted with 3 vacancies under the Entry Level Bargaining Unit Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting and randomly validated applicants out of 354 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 131 eligible candidates. This sequence should be addressed further in the next DOC's Report.

Inspector General Investigator

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the General Hiring Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting and validated 58 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validation, resulting in 35 eligible candidates. The interview process occurred without issue with the DOC monitoring 8 interviews. No candidates were ranked during the Ranking Meeting, which lead to a second round of interviews. The interview process occurred without issue with the DOC monitoring 8 interviews. During the Ranking Meeting, the Interview Panel ranked 2 candidate(s). The top ranked candidate accepted the position. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Office Clerk

The position was properly posted with 5 vacancies under the Entry Level Bargaining Unit Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting and randomly validated applicants out of 783 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 346 eligible candidates. This sequence should be addressed further in the next DOC's Report.

Operations Manager

The position was properly posted with 2 vacancies under the General Hiring Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting and validated applicants out of 322 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 106 eligible candidates. Subsequently, 3 additional vacancies were approved. In an effort to allow for more internal promotions of historical talent and knowledge, the minimum qualifications for the position were updated to include time worked at the Clerk's

Office. As such, the requisition was cancelled and reposted and all applicants received notification of this cancellation along with instruction on how to (re)apply to the new posting. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Operations Manager- Repost

The position was properly posted with 5 vacancies under the General Hiring Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization, sorting and validated 251 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validation resulting in 68 eligible candidates. Interviews were held over multiple days and the interview process occurred without significant issue with the DOC monitoring 48 interviews. In one instance, after the interview concluded, a panel member who participated virtually, alerted the DOC to a technical difficulty during the interview. HR was able to contact the candidate before the candidate left the premises and the panelist was able to ask the requisite interview question(s) and collect the candidate's answers. ***I recommended that HR identify and implement a protocol for technical difficulties during virtual interviews (e.g. loss of connectivity).*** During the Ranking Meeting, the Interview Panel determined whether a candidate should remain on the Ranked Eligibility List; 19 candidates were ranked. Average interview scores determined the ranked order, in the case of those candidates who received the same average interview score, the date and time of the submitted application was used to determine ranked order. This sequence should be addressed further in the next DOC's Report.

Senior Budget Analyst*

The position was filled via an employee reassignment, outside of the General Hiring Process. While the assigned employee is otherwise eligible, because this position is non-exempt, and in this instance, no provision within the Plan and/or Supplemental Policies provides an exception to filling this position other than the General Hiring Process, the reassignment is in violation of the Plan. ****It is imperative that the Clerk's Office continues to utilize the appropriate hiring processes to fill non-exempt positions to reduce the appearance of impropriety.***

SQL Database Administrator

The position was properly posted with 1 vacancy under the General Hiring Process. The DOC reviewed and verified randomization and sorting and validated 21 applications and came to agreement with HR on its validating resulting in 5 eligible candidates. Subsequently, this position was cancelled and reclassified as Actively Recruited to allow for an Application Panel Review due to its technical specificity and specialized skill requirements. All applicants received notice of this cancellation. No issues were identified with this sequence.

Interns:

Five (5) unpaid interns were placed in various departments/offices within the Clerk's Office, to include 2 interns in Court Operations, 1 intern in External Affairs, 1 intern in the General Counsel's Office, and 1 intern in MIS.

Lateral Transfers:

One (1) lateral transfer opportunity was posted for Court Clerk Trainer (2025-L1).

2025-Court Clerk Trainer (January 13 – January 20, 2025). A lateral bid opportunity was posted for 5 vacancies. Eleven (11) applications were submitted, 3 of which were submitted by employees who did not hold the correct title, resulting in 8 eligible candidates. On January 24, 2025, 8 eligible candidates were offered the lateral transfer, solely based on seniority, with 4 employees accepting offers. Due to operational needs and a reallocation of resources, the posting was cancelled and all awarded positions were rescinded. A new lateral posting, with a revised vacancy, list was later released.

2025 Court Clerk Trainer Repost (February 24 – March 3, 2025 and March 4 – March 9, 2025). A lateral bid opportunity was posted for 5 vacancies on February 24, 2025 and subsequently rescinded on February 27, 2025 due to the lack of department specific listings of law for the suburban districts. Additionally, upon the appointment of the new Executive Clerk of Court Operations, the number of vacancies was reduced from 5 to 3. The updated bid opportunity was reposted on March 4, 2025. Eight (8) applications were submitted, 1 of which was a duplicate, and 2 of which were submitted by employees who did not hold the correct title, resulting in 5 eligible candidates. Following a discussion with the Union, the Clerk's Office reached a mutual understanding to proceed with honoring the original offers made on January 24, 2025.

Promotions:

No promotional opportunities were posted during this period.

- **Other Employment Actions**

I reviewed over 500 original and revised Notice of Employee Actions (NEA's) for several employment actions including but limited to:

Discipline: During this reporting period, 149 instances of discipline were processed, of those 2 disciplinary actions were withdrawn. Repeated tardiness was the most frequently cited infraction, followed closely by employee conduct.

Hire: During this reporting period, 56 hires were processed.

Overtime: During this reporting period, 12 employees completed overtime projects.

Probationary Performance Evaluation: During this reporting period, I reviewed 86 Probationary Performance Evaluations. While HR continues to quality control submitted evaluations and

provide feedback to supervisors on how to complete the Probationary Performance Evaluation Forms in line with the Policy, ***it is recommended that the CDC or Designee perform a quality audit on evaluations, ensuring that each employee is adequately evaluated prior to submission to HR and/or the DOC for review.***

Reassignment: During this reporting period, 5 reassignments were processed. Of note, 1 of which involved a non-union, non-exempt position, in violation of Section VI. General Hiring Process of the Employment Plan.

Reclassification: The Clerk's Office processed 37 reclassifications, to include the following changes in position job code/title and/or pay grade:

Previous Job Code/Title	Pay Grade	New Job Code/Title	Pay Grade
9414.HR Coordinator (2)	17	9414.HR Generalist	17
5772. Personnel Analyst III	16	9414.HR Generalist	17
9210.Workforce Strategy Analyst (2)	20	9210.Human Resources Analyst	20
9211.Senior Workforce Strategy Analyst	22	9211.Senior Human Resources Analyst	21
9323.Office Clerk	12	9328. Financial Clerk	12
3050.Administrative Assistant IV	18	2791.Senior Administrative Assistant	18
6896.Administrative Support III	15		
6897.Administrative Support IV	16		
6899.Administrative Support VI	18		
6901.Administrative Support VIII	20	2792.SeniorAdministrative Assistant II	20
9577.SQL Database Administrator	21	3018.SQL Server Database Administrator	22
9224.Server Administrator	22	3017.Senior Server Administrator	22

All reclassification requests were submitted with rationales and explanations, including revised position descriptions and organizational charts. Some of the reclassification requests were questioned by the DOC as being inappropriate; other requests made operational sense and were outdated positions performed by employees handling much more complex and technical duties. All memoranda were reviewed and justified requests were ultimately approved by the DOC.

The requisite Notices of Exemption to those affected Administrative Assistant and Administrative Support employees were not included in the Notices of Employment Action nor was the DOC copied on the communication to those employees. Subsequently, HR provided the DOC with copies of the communication to the affected employees.

Separation: During this reporting period, 40 separations were processed.

Work Schedule Modification: During this reporting period, 27 work schedule modifications were processed.

Notification of Employment Action/Notice of Employee Action (NEA)

The majority of NEA's are being sent to the DOC in a timely manner, however there are instances in which the notice is sent weeks, months, and in one case, more than one year, after the actions have occurred. In this case, a demotion that occurred in 2023 was not processed, and notice sent, until 2025. Additionally, some NEA's are missing supporting documentation.

HR does a good job of reviewing and returning erroneous NEAs to supervisors, however it is desired that management review and correct NEAs prior to submission to HR. Consistent with the previous DOC's reports, ***I recommend that HR continue to remind supervisors that NEA's must be submitted on a timely basis in accordance with the Plan and that discipline be imposed on supervisors who continue to miss deadlines.***

Ineligible for Hire/Rehire List

Former employees and candidates deemed disqualified or ineligible for employment due to reasons listed in Section IV. R.1 Ineligible for Hire/Rehire List are placed on an Ineligible for Hire/Rehire List (List). Individuals on the List are not allowed to move forward in the hiring process, whether the position is Non-Exempt or Exempt.

As published in the previous Report, 1 individual was placed on the List on November 8, 2024 and filed a timely appeal which occurred during this reporting period. I recommended the removal of this individual from the List. The Chief of Staff concurred with this recommendation and the individual was removed.

No individuals were placed on the List during this reporting period.

Investigations

Complaints under my authority to investigate include alleged violations of the Employment Plan, Supplemental Policies, Unlawful Political Discrimination and Unlawful Political Contacts. The DOC may coordinate with the CHRO or Designee and/or the Clerk's Office OIG or Designee on further investigation of the alleged violation. At the conclusion of the investigation, the DOC shall prepare a DOC Investigation Report and provide copies to the Clerk, COS, CHRO or Designee and OIG.

No DOC Investigation Reports were issued this reporting period.

Second Step Grievance Hearings

I monitored 4 Second-Step Grievance Hearings during this reporting period and did not observe any discrepancies during the monitored hearings with respect to following written procedures.

Position Descriptions

- **Non-Exempt:**

I reviewed and provided feedback on the following position descriptions during this time: IT Data Analyst, IT Security Analyst, Operations Manager, Paralegal, Senior Server Administrator, Server Administrator, SQL Database Administrator, and SQL Server Database Administrator.

Consistent with the Plan, the Clerk’s Office welcomed feedback and proposed revisions from the DOC.

- **Union:**

I reviewed and provided feedback on the following newly created union position descriptions during this time: Desktop Support Analyst I and Desktop Support Technician I.

Consistent with the Plan, the Clerk’s Office welcomed feedback and proposed revisions from the DOC.

Exempt List and Exempt Job Descriptions

The following changes were proposed by the Clerk’s Office to be made to the Exempt List:

Add:	Community Engagement & Outreach Coordinator (paused); Senior Publication, Digital & Multimedia Coordinator; Senior Administrative Assistant
Retitle:	Chief Technology Officer to Deputy Chief Information Officer – Enterprise Director of Workforce Development to Director of Hiring and Change Management
Update:	Deputy CIO – Enterprise Systems Deputy CIO – Infrastructure Services

Consistent with the Plan, the Clerk’s Office provided notice to the DOC with the required rationale and position descriptions. After review and comment, the DOC raised no objection to the changes.

Clerk’s Website

The Plan specifies certain content and information that our website must contain, making it one of the main mechanisms to providing transparency into our implementation of and compliance with the Plan.

- **Quarterly Employment Action Reports**

The HR website is current through the 1st quarter of 2025 with reports that reflect the total number of hires, promotions, transfers, and terminations by department, including designations of Exempt positions.

Other Recommendations

- The Clerk's Office's participation in the County's Hiring Fair was a great opportunity for job seekers to learn more about how to apply for positions. Current employees would also benefit from information sessions and/or workshops on topics like career goal setting, resume writing, interview skills, and navigating career paths within the organization.
- Integrate time and attendance into performance reviews to reinforce the Attendance Policy and professional responsibility.

Meetings

I have an established standing meeting with the Chief of Staff, to discuss the Compliance Program and any issues that may need attention to ensure the Program is effective. Additionally, I meet with the CHRO on all facets of the Program. As needed, I meet with the Inspector General and Ethics Officer regarding all aspects of the Employment Plan, including complaints and investigations.

Conclusion

Consistency with requisite steps are vital in maintaining substantial compliance of the Employment Plan and this Report shows that the Clerk's Office continues to implement the plan in a reasonable manner. As always, I am appreciative of the assistance and collaboration received as I carry out my compliance related activities.