

Celebrating AmeriCorps Week March 10-16, 2024.

AmeriCorps Week is a time to recognize the commitment of the millions of Americans who have chosen to serve their country through AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps seniors, and encourage others to follow in their footsteps.



This year, AmeriCorps is celebrating three decades of national service. 30 years ago, more than 20,000 Americans raised their right hands and pledged to get things done for America. These members helped more than 1,000 communities nationwide during their first year of service. Since then, more than 1.25 million Americans and hundreds of thousands more AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers of all backgrounds have followed in their footsteps, providing billions of hours of results-driven service across each of the 50 states and US territories.

This past year in Illinois, more than 9,900 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers of diverse ages and backgrounds helped to meet local needs at more than 1,100 locations in the State by responding to disasters, mentoring children and youth, combat hunger and homelessness, help seniors live independently, supporting veterans and military families, fighting the opioid epidemic, restoring the environment, and increasing access to justice.

Illinois JusticeCorps is an innovative AmeriCorps program that places volunteers in courthouses around Illinois to help people without lawyers navigate the civil justice system. Volunteers are trained and supported to provide legal information and procedural guidance, as well as connect self-represented litigants with legal aid services and self-help resources. The program provides a unique opportunity to gain exposure to the court system, build professional skills, and give back to the community.

Dear Members of the McLean County Bar Association,

Over the past year, our team of volunteers has been able to work with hundreds of self-represented litigants in the Bloomington courthouse to close the gap in justice that isn't afforded to every member of our community. Getting to serve as the full-time JusticeCorps fellow this year has been deeply rewarding, and I wanted to share my experience with you all.

I started my term with ILJusticeCorps in August of 2023 in the McLean County Law and Justice Center Law Library helping mostly self-represented litigants with their cases. Our team of volunteers and AmeriCorps members mostly help with civil cases – especially family and protective orders – but also assist with criminal and traffic matters at times. Together, we help people complete their paperwork, conduct legal research, and connect with other community programs that will help them in and out of court. Additionally, you can find us outside of the Law Library assisting with the County's foreclosure pre-mediation program and Prairie State's

eviction clinics. I started this term just hoping to learn more about the legal process but have also been able to make great connections between JusticeCorps and other community outreach organizations in our district.

Working with a population that struggles from overlapping issues of poverty, limited English proficiency, and other marginalized status can be very challenging, though it is equally gratifying when those who receive our help come back to thank us for getting them to the next step in their case. We see people dealing with monumental problems, but we're able to empower and educate them enough to feel confident in their case. I hope that during the remainder of my service year, I can continue to support self-represented litigants and help the McLean County JusticeCorps program grow. If you have ever referred someone to us, thank you so much. And in the spirit of AmeriCorps week, please spread the word of what Illinois JusticeCorps does and take time to think of how you can give back to our community.

In honor of AmeriCorps week, I want to thank everyone who supports us. I deeply appreciate the effort of each of our JusticeCorps members and volunteers: Karthik, Amrutha, Emmalie, Shruthi, Rowan, and Hali. Thank you, Jenna Kearns and Mary Sellmeyer, for supervising the McLean County JusticeCorps program, and for providing support and insight that has led to the success of our team and each patron we meet. And thank you especially to every member of the Bar Foundation, each staff person of the courthouse, and every community partner who has supported us and the people we serve.

Sincerely,
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