

CIRCUIT COURT OF SALINE COUNTY



Jayson M. Clark

Resident Circuit Judge and Presiding Judge

Circuit Court of Saline County

Saline County Courthouse

10 E. Poplar Street

Harrisburg, IL 62946

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March 18, 2026

[REDACTED]

VIA HAND DELIVERY AT COUNTY BOARD OFFICE

Jay D. Williams, Chairman

Saline County Board

10 E. Poplar St.

Harrisburg, Illinois 62946

Re: County Board Use of Saline County Courtrooms

Dear Chairman Williams:

The Saline County Board has long held its meetings inside Courtroom A of the Saline County Courthouse with the permission (or acquiescence) of the Saline County Presiding Judge. The Chief Judge designated me to be the Presiding Judge of Saline County on March 13, 2023. Since that time, the County Board has never asked for my permission to use Courtroom A. Nevertheless, like my predecessors, I have acquiesced in the County Board's continued use of that space. After personally attending the Saline County Board meeting on October 30, 2025, and otherwise observing use of our courtroom by the Saline County Board, I have decided that my acquiescence with the Saline County Board's use of courtrooms to conduct its public meetings should end. The County Board will not be permitted to use the courtrooms in Saline County to conduct its public meetings any longer.

As the Illinois Supreme Court recognized over 120 years ago:

[A]fter the particular court rooms in a court house have been provided for the judges, the possession thereof is in the hands and under the control of the courts themselves, and the care and custody thereof rightfully belong to the sheriff, as the executive officer of the courts ... [t]he custody of the court house by the sheriff is the custody of an officer of the courts, who is subject to their control. In other words, it is the custody of the courts themselves.

Dahnke v. People, 168 Ill. 102, 114, 48 N.E. 137, 141 (1897). Because the courtrooms in Saline County are in the custody of the courts themselves, the requirements of the Court's rules governing use of its courtrooms apply at all times and regardless of whether court proceedings are in session or have been adjourned. Id. (recognizing that "[t]here is danger that [judicial] independence will be sacrificed, if the judges are not allowed free access to their court rooms and control over the same during the sessions of the court, and during its necessary seasons of adjournment.").

As you know, *Administrative Order No. 2024-6-27* (entered by the Chief Judge of the First Judicial Circuit on June 27, 2004) prohibits the use of cameras, televisions, or other recording or broadcast equipment in a courtroom,

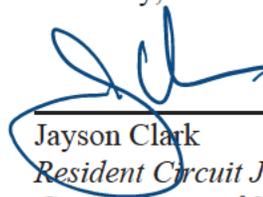
in the immediate vicinity of a courtroom, and in the chambers and offices of the court without the express, advance, written permission of the Presiding Judge of the county. To facilitate County Board compliance with the Open Meetings Act while also ensuring compliance with *Administrative Order No. 2024-6-27*, I coordinated with you in your capacity as County Board Chairman as well as the County Clerk and the Circuit Clerk to make the courtroom audio/video recording and broadcasting system available for use by the County Board. My hope was that use of our courtroom system, with its high-quality audio and video broadcast and recording capabilities, would enhance public access to such a degree that use of personal recording devices in violation of *Administrative Order No. 2024-6-27* would not be an issue. Apparently, that has not been the case. I understand that some members of the Saline County Board have continued using their own personal devices to record and/or broadcast meetings inside the courtroom in violation of *Administrative Order No. 2024-6-27*. Under these circumstances, it is clear that the Saline County Board cannot comply with both *Administrative Order No. 2024-6-27* and the Open Meetings Act. As a result, the Board will need to find a different location to hold its public meetings.

There have been other problems involving use of the courtrooms by the County Board that also warrant some mention here. For years, Judge's Office staff have found trash left behind in the jury box and other areas of the courtroom by County Board members and other attendees after County Board meetings. The disrespect that this shows for the courtroom is self-evident. Judge's Office staff should not have to clean up the mess left behind by County Board members and other attendees. What might not be so self-evident about this situation is the fact that inmates from the Saline County Jail typically sit in those same areas of the courtroom during criminal court proceedings. There are many different types of contraband that an inmate might acquire as a result of a County Board member leaving their refuse in that area. Seemingly innocuous trash could be used by some inmates to defeat their restraints or possibly be used as a weapon. This creates a security risk for everyone in the courtroom. This is a situation that I know judges in the past have discussed with past County Boards and it has continued to be a problem despite prior warnings by the Court that it must not continue.

The conduct of some County Board members during the meetings in the courtroom has also created other unnecessary risks. For example, during the October 30, 2025 meeting, I watched one County Board member walk up the steps next to the Circuit Clerk's station and then linger behind the bench before proceeding to walk across the west wall and over to the jury box. No member of the County Board has any legitimate reason to be in the area behind the bench. This conduct created an unnecessary risk of exposing confidential information. We regularly conduct our confidential juvenile court proceedings in the courtrooms, as well as mental health proceedings, family law cases, and many other case types which often involve confidentiality concerns. There is also equipment behind the bench that belongs to the State of Illinois and which no one (including members of the judiciary) is permitted to alter.

Having given due consideration to the County Board's history of using courtrooms in Saline County for its public meetings, I have determined that such use simply cannot continue. The County Board has demonstrated that it cannot comply with both the Open Meetings Act and *Administrative Order No. 2024-6-27*. The County Board has also demonstrated through the actions of some of its members that those members are incapable or unwilling to treat the courtroom with the dignity and respect that is required of all citizens, regardless of the office they may currently occupy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jayson Clark", is written over a solid black horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jayson Clark
*Resident Circuit Judge and Presiding Judge
Circuit Court of Saline County, Illinois*

cc: Paige Schimp, County Board Secretary (via email: countyboard02@salinecounty.illinois.gov)