

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

STALLED JUSTICE

Cook County courts make slow progress

Old cases still linger on dockets as push being made for reform

By Joe Mahr
and Megan Crepeau
Chicago Tribune

Shawn Jones has spent 12 years jailed without a trial — a “pure hell” that he hopes will end soon with a new judge who has been pushing to give Jones his day in court. Elsewhere in the massive Cook

County court system, Donna Wuchter is losing hope the courts will ever hold a trial for the man accused of killing her friend. She has been waiting for 11 years and counting, enduring a cycle of delays she sums up with one word: “craziness.”

The two cases help sum up the situation in the notoriously slow

Cook County courts since the Tribune published its “Stalled Justice” investigation in April: hints of progress but enormous challenges remaining.

The series chronicled how Cook murder cases were taking longer than ever to conclude, and longer than in any other major court system that could be stud-

ied. Reporters uncovered multiple chokepoints that were stalling cases long before the pandemic, in a system overseen by judges who allowed cases to languish and court leaders who ignored repeated recommendations for fixes.

Since then, the Tribune has found some signs of improvement. Attorneys say evidence is being shared faster with the help of new technology, more staff members and stricter rules, while judges are

questioning delays more aggressively and setting more deadline to complete pretrial tasks.

But those changes have come in a court system still steeped in bureaucracy, with a history of halfhearted reforms. Researchers have blamed a culture that too often rationalizes delays instead of tackling them, creating a level of dysfunction that Sheriff Tom

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CITY AT A CROSSROADS

Johnson's administration enters new year as relentless migrant issues shade other achievements

By Alice Yin
Chicago Tribune

On Mayor Brandon Johnson's first full day in office, he visited ground zero of the crisis that would come to define his next seven months.

Striding into the 12th District Chicago police station on the Near West Side in May, the new chief executive clasped his hands before his waist as he surveyed a lobby floor cluttered with sleeping bags and families of bleary-eyed migrants.

“How do you like Chicago so far?” Johnson asked a woman and boy, with

political ally and local Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez, 25th, translating in Spanish.

As an aide implored TV news crews to step back, the mayor continued: “As a city, we’re going to do everything we can to make this place, your opportunities, more comfortable.”

Now heading into a new year, many Chicagoans are judging the mayor's performance so far based on how they think he has handled that early promise of clearing out the police stations and humanely resettling asylum-seekers, many of whom arrive impoverished from Venezuela.

Above: Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, left, dances with Alice Smith and plays the tambourine as the Chicago Windy City Ramblers perform at a Kwanzaa celebration at the Conrad Worrill Track & Field Stadium on Tuesday. Seven months into his tenure, the migrant issue has threatened to eclipse Johnson's broader agenda. **TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

The singular issue has threatened to eclipse Johnson's broader agenda, though he points to recent City Council wins on labor requirements and more as evidence he's living up to his leftist bona fides.

Johnson is the most progressive mayor now leading a major American city, and his victory was seen as an electoral mandate for his prescription of bold investments for the working class while leading with compassion.

But the desperation of the migrant

Turn to Mayor, Page 8

How one migrant family honors past, present



Yuledy Mendez sits with her nephew Derick Cubillan and her brother Pedro while Derick's mother takes a photo on Christmas Eve in their home in Chicago. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

The Mendezes celebrate first holiday season in Chicago

By Nell Salzman
Chicago Tribune

Unbeknownst to the children of the Mendez family, Christmas for their mother, Esperanza, was a game of counting — counting hours, counting bills.

The Mendezes, who settled in Chicago after enduring the strenuous journey from their home in Maracaibo, Venezuela, had spent previous Christmases surrounded by family and visiting neighbors and loved ones. They'd shared plates of food and gathered around chairs and tables in the street. Kids ran around and lit fireworks in the tropical, muggy air.

But this year, the hours passed

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INSIDE



TRENT SPRAGUE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Questions surround Fields' future at QB

By most accounts, Justin Fields has made steps toward becoming the type of QB the team can win with. Is it enough to persuade the Bears to bet on him again? **Chicago Sports**

Making resolutions in the new year?

Roughly a third of American adults will. Seven tips to help keep those New Year's resolutions, from a University of Chicago expert on motivation. **Chicagoland, Page 3**

