

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 155, No. 117

Tuesday, June 16, 2009

## Continuing legal education deadline nears for second cohort of lawyers

By John Flynn Rooney  
Law Bulletin staff writer

Lawyers who have hit upon hard economic times and have yet to amass all of the continuing legal education credits required by June 30 will have access to free or low-cost programs.

"We have heard from some attorneys who have a need for either no-cost or low-cost options," Karen Litscher Johnson, director of the Illinois Supreme Court's Minimum Continuing Legal Education Board, said Tuesday. "Given recent layoffs in the legal profession, we want to make sure we are providing additional resources to help attorneys identify those options."

There are about 300 CLE providers accredited by the MCLE Board, approximately 100 of which are law firms and government entities that provide only in-house courses, according to Johnson.

The MCLE Board late last week sent notices to about 200 providers asking whether they provide programs that cost nothing or are priced at less than \$20 per credit hour, Johnson said, and more than 50 CLE providers responded that they do provide such programming.

Information about free or low-cost CLE programs is expected to be posted by Thursday afternoon on the board's Web site, [www.mcleboard.org](http://www.mcleboard.org).

"We are also doing some free programs to serve our members during this tough economy," said Jeanne B. Heaton, the Illinois State Bar Association's CLE director.

In September 2005, the Illinois Supreme Court adopted a rule requiring continuing legal education. There currently are about 86,000 registered Illinois lawyers.

Lawyers whose last names begin with the letters A through M were required to report that they had completed 20 hours of CLE training by July 31, 2008.

Lawyers whose last names begin with the letters N through Z are to log 20 hours of CLE by month's end, and to report compliance by July 31. The requirement rises to 24 hours in the following two years and 30 hours in each two-year period thereafter.

The rules provide that at least four hours of CLE taken during any two-year period must relate to matters such as professionalism, diversity, mental illness and addiction, civility or legal ethics.

About 60 percent of the state's registered lawyers fall into the A-M category, while more than 35,000 are in the N-Z group.

Nearly 16,000 members of the N-Z category have reported their MCLE status, with about 8,900 doing so online and the remainder filing their reports on paper, Johnson said.

"I thought the first-year reporting period went well considering it was the first time going through," Johnson said. "Our observation here ... is that things have gone even more smoothly for the first reporting for the N-to-Z attorneys."

As for programs offered to the N-Z category, "it's a smaller number, so the crowds are less this time around," Steven C. Rahn, director of courses for The Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education, said Tuesday. "There seems to be less urgency."

IICLE is offering three live CLE programs in Chicago during the next week and also provides programming online and via DVD. More information about those options is available on the institute's Web site, [www.iicle.com](http://www.iicle.com).

The Chicago Bar Association will offer live CLE programming through month's end, said David G. Harding, chair of the association's CLE committee. More details about those programs can be found at [www.chicagobar.org](http://www.chicagobar.org).

The ISBA is holding a "CLE Fest"

Thursday through Saturday at its Chicago office, 20 S. Clark St. The programs will be simultaneously available on a Webcast, Heaton said. Additional details can be found at [www.isba.org](http://www.isba.org).

"We are not disappointed with the participation in live and electronic programs, but we are down from last year," Heaton said. "Another reason that we are not disappointed is that the lawyers in the N-through-Z category have had 3 $\Omega$  years to earn their 20 hours of MCLE credit.

"We think they may have spread it out more equally during that period, rather than waiting," Heaton said. The staff of the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission has made more than 90 CLE presentations to law firms and bar groups thus far in 2009, said Peter L. Rotskoff, litigation manager for the commission's Springfield office. ARDC staffers also will be in the field making CLE presentations this week and next week, he added.

More information can be found on the commission's Web site, [www.iardc.org](http://www.iardc.org). The Law Bulletin Publishing Co. also is an accredited MCLE provider.

Another option exists for those who procrastinate, but it comes with additional cost.

A grace period exists until Sept. 30, which will allow lawyers to complete their CLE credit and certify that they are compliant, according to Johnson.

Lawyers who report by July 31 that they have not met their MCLE requirements and pay a \$100 fee will have until Sept. 30 to submit a report showing that the necessary courses have been completed, according to Johnson. If a lawyer doesn't seek an extension by July 31, the fee rises to \$150.

Lawyers who do not meet the MCLE requirements at all are referred for disciplinary action.