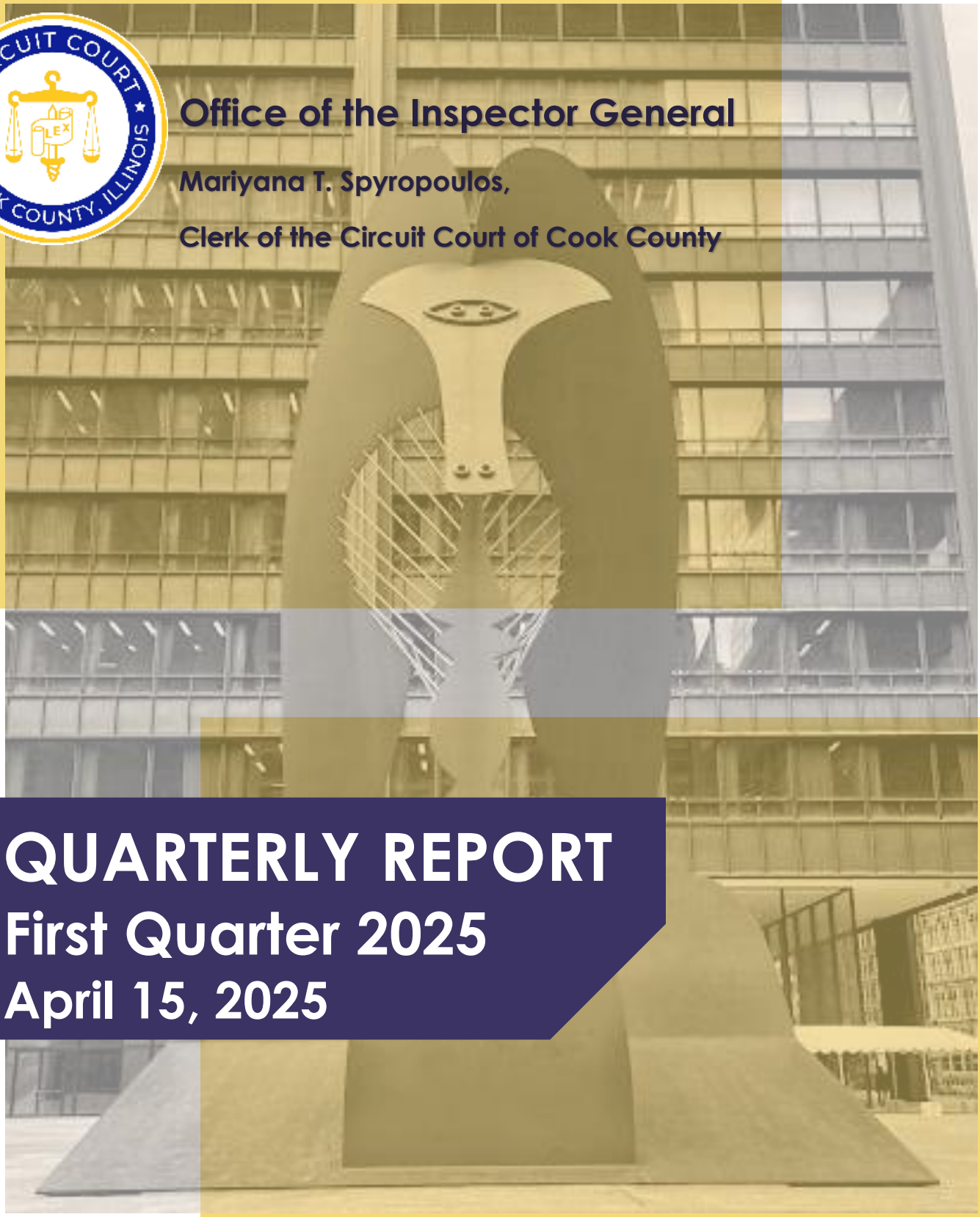

Office of the Inspector General

Mariyana T. Spyropoulos,

Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County

QUARTERLY REPORT

First Quarter 2025

April 15, 2025

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To the Honorable Clerk Mariyana Spyropoulos, the Executive Staff, and all residents whom we serve:

Enclosed for your review is the public report on the operations of the activities of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County (Clerk's Office) for January 1, 2025 through March 31, 2025.

About the Office of Inspector General

OIG's mission is to promote economy, effectiveness, efficiency, and integrity in the operation of the Clerk's Office. To this end, OIG works to detect, deter, and prevent corruption, fraud, waste, mismanagement, and misconduct in the operation of the Clerk's Office, with integrity and professionalism. OIG conducts investigations and issues summary reports of investigations with findings and recommendations for corrective action. OIG issues summary reports to the Clerk and the appropriate members of the Executive Team. OIG releases narrative summaries of its investigations in publicly shared quarterly reports.

The OIG receives submissions through the OIG telephone hotline, mail, web, email, fax, direct report, and a QR code customer service survey (CSS). OIG categorizes submissions into management inquiries (MIs) and case files (CFs). MI is a submission that does not result in an OIG investigation. MI may be a complaint, inquiry, or a compliment. OIG refers MIs to the appropriate external agencies or internal departments for resolution. OIG follows up on referrals to internal departments to ensure that any complaints were resolved. CF is a submission that falls within OIG's jurisdiction and, based on preliminary review, warrants further investigation.

I | INTAKES

1 | Intakes Received this Quarter

During Q1, OIG received a total of 249 submissions through the OIG telephone hotline, mail, web, email, fax, direct report, and the QR Code Customer Service Survey.

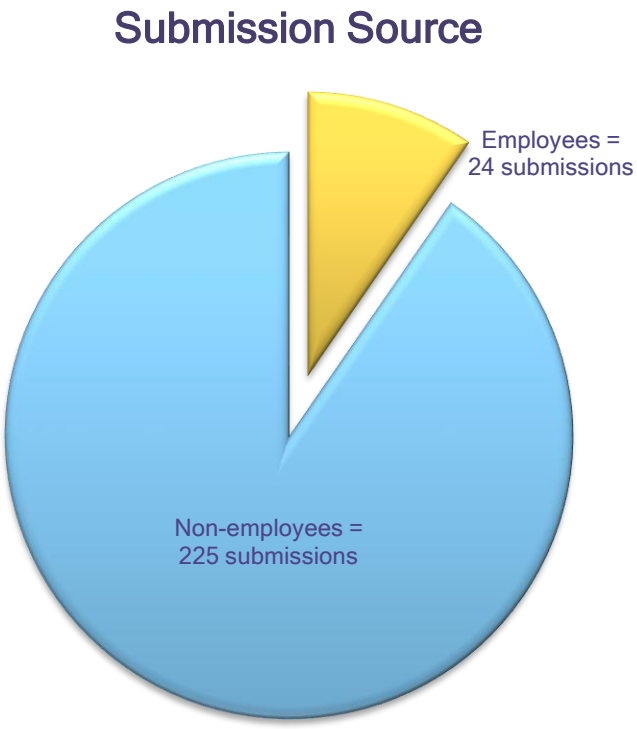
Of the 249 total submissions, OIG classified 224 as MIs, and 25 as CFs.

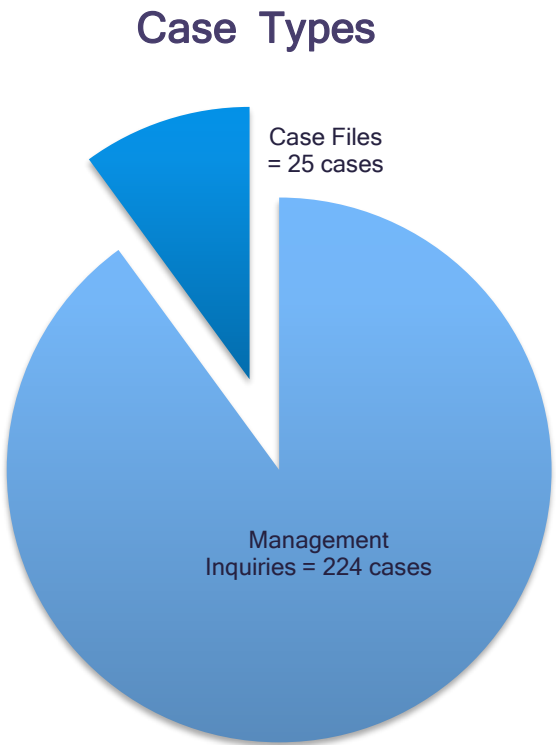
- Of the 25 CFs, 22 were submitted by employees and 3 by non-employees.
- Of the 224 MIs, 222 were from non-employees and 2 were from employees.

Of the 249 total submissions, Clerk's Office employees submitted 24 and non-employees submitted 225.

The following graphs show the percentage of employee vs non-employee submissions and their classifications.

Intakes Chart: Submission Source and Classification



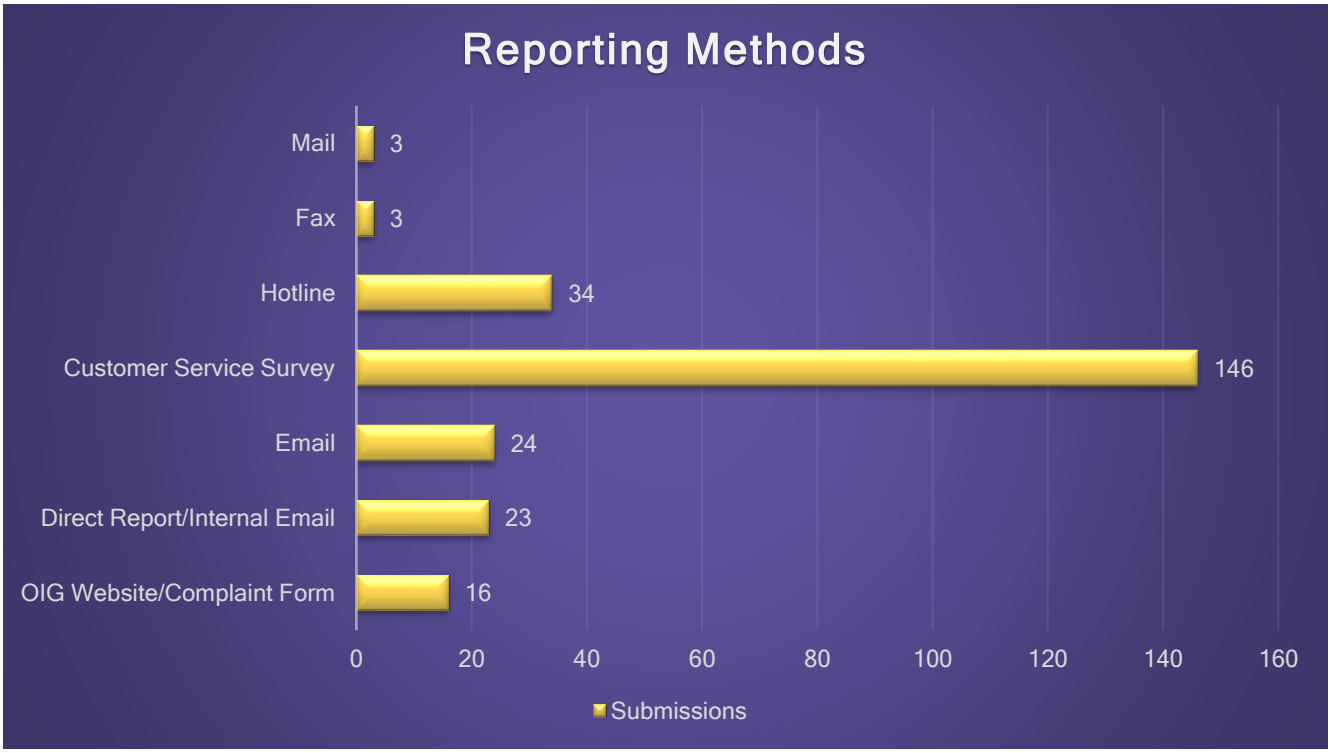


2 | Customer Service Survey (CSS) Submissions

On February 10, 2025, the Clerk launched an updated QR Code CSS and made it accessible to a wider audience by increasing its visibility on the CCC website and in various physical CCC locations. Following the launch of the updated CSS, OIG received more submissions in the first week than it had received in the previous three months. Overall, the CSS and the OIG Hotline were the most popular venues for non-employee submissions. Employees were most likely to internally report the matter through email and/or directly to supervisors, Human Resources, or OIG.

The following chart shows the various reporting methods by which submissions were received.

Intakes Chart: Intakes by Reporting Method



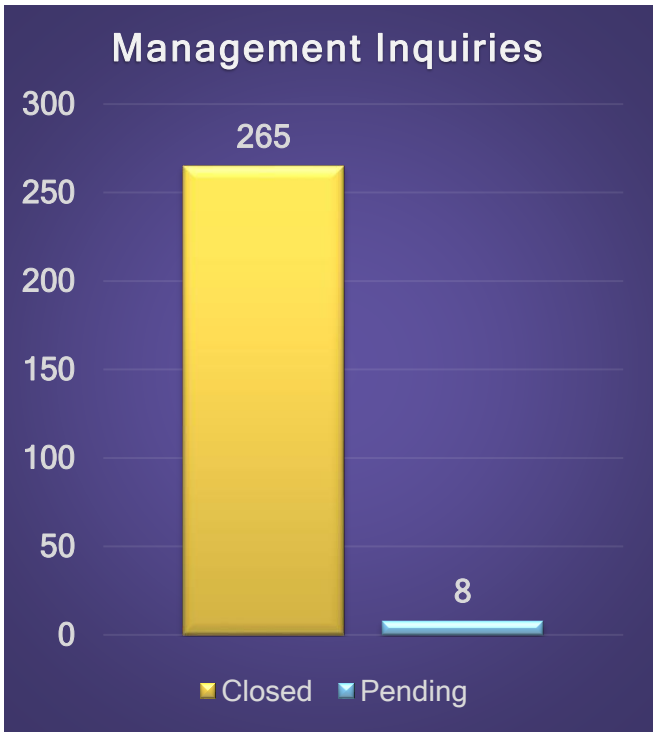
3 | Pending Cases at the Beginning of Q1

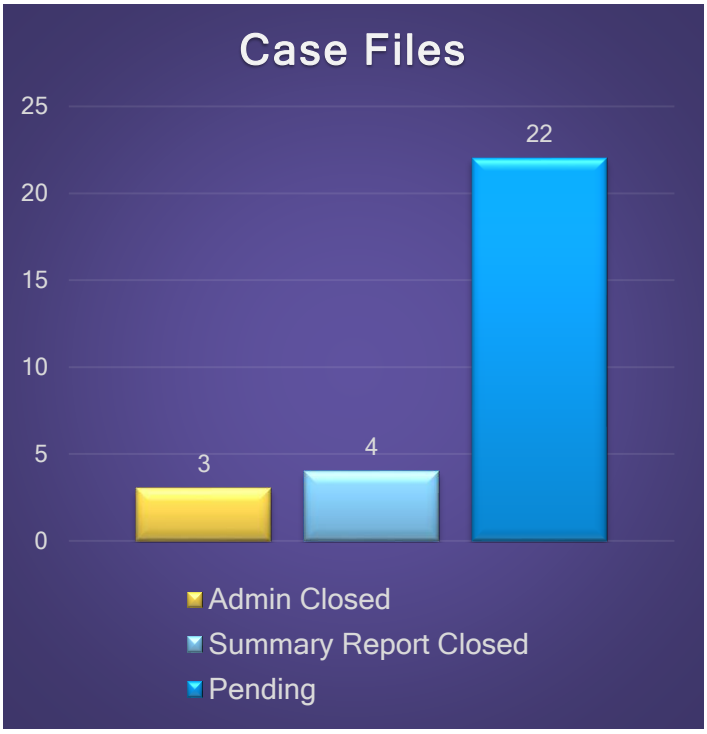
At the beginning of Q1, OIG had 45 open CFs and MIs. There were 41 open MIs and four open CFs. Of the four CFs, one was from Q4 2022 and three were from Q4 2024. OIG closed two of the four pending case files in Q1. OIG closed all 41 MIs in Q1.

4 | Total Active Cases at the End of Q1

Of the 294 cases active during Q1, OIG closed 265 MIs and seven CFs. Three CFs were administratively closed and four were closed with summary reports. There were 30 total active cases (22 CFs & 8 MIs) pending at the end of the quarter.

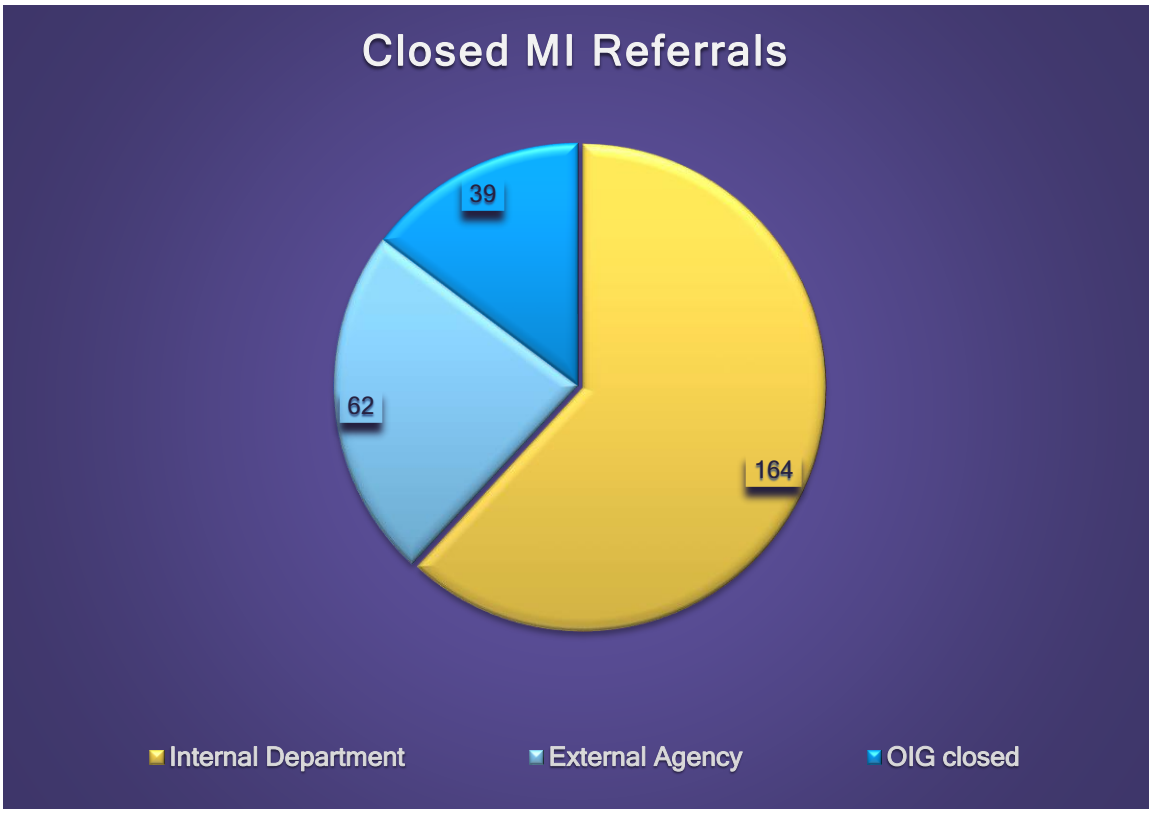
Pending Cases Charts: End of Q1





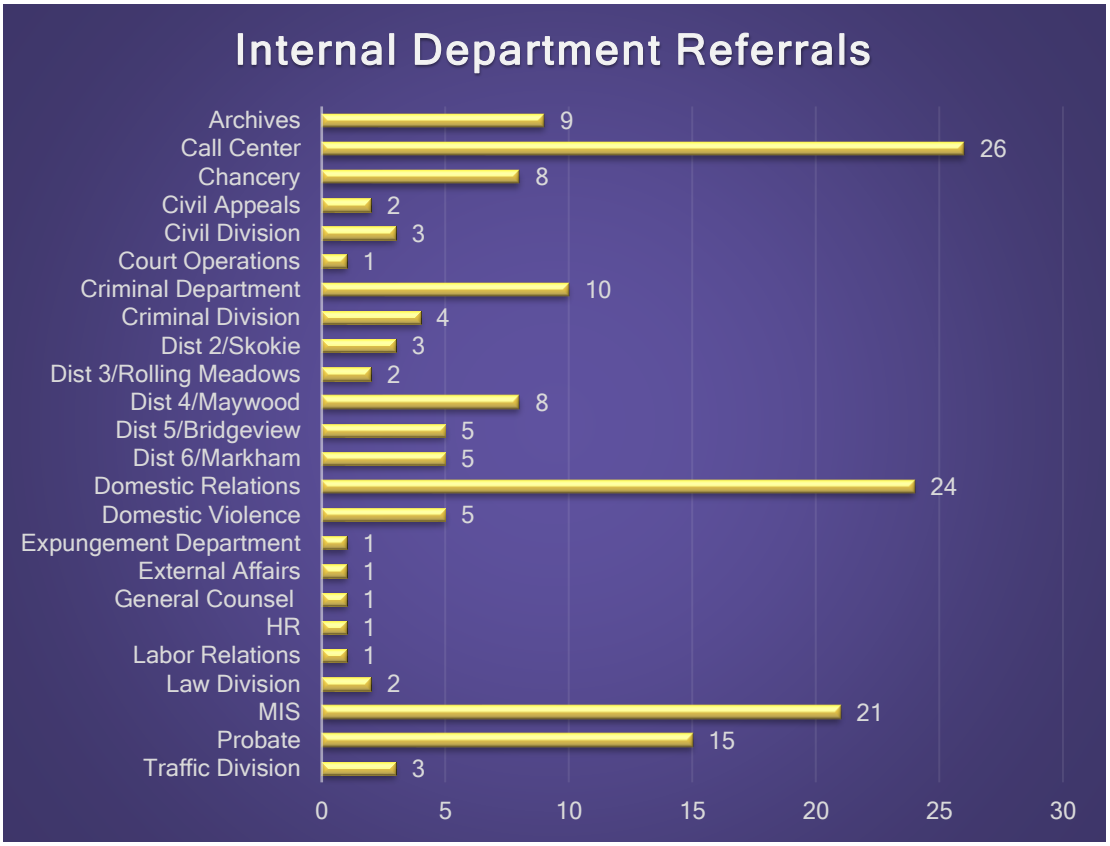
5 | Referred Intakes

Of the total 265 MIs closed during Q1, OIG referred 164 to internal departments, 62 to external agencies. The OIG administratively closed 39 MIs. Some submissions were referred to more than one department or agency.

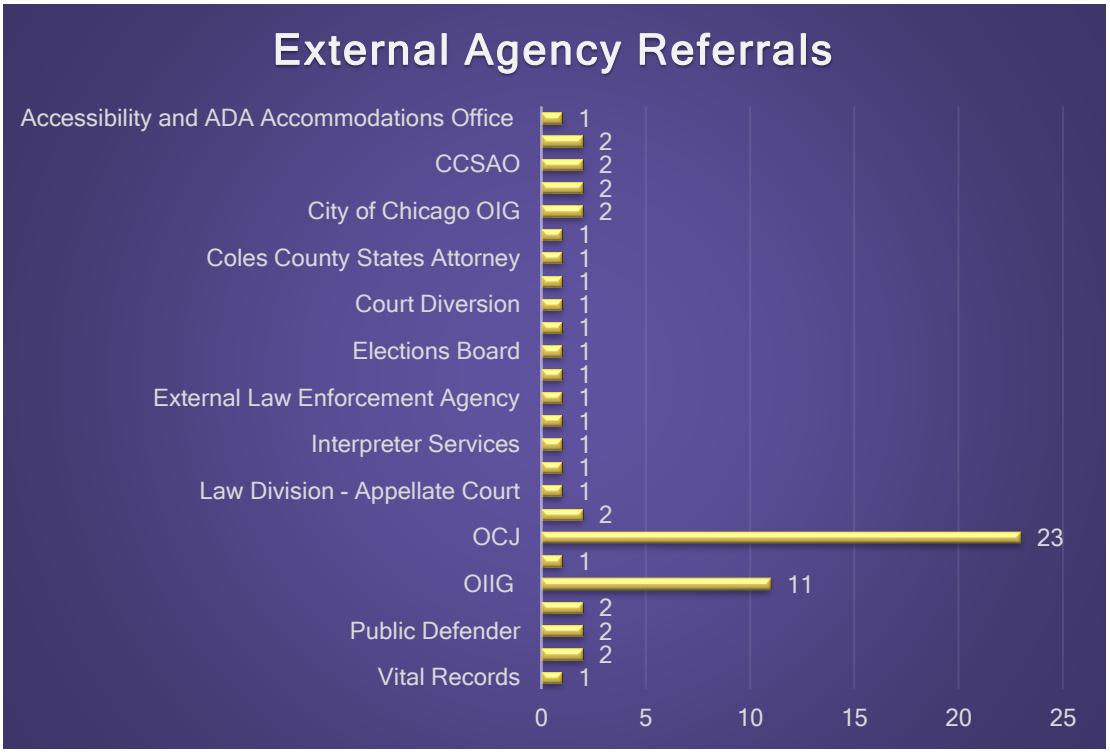


Internal Department Referrals

Of the 164 referrals to internal departments, 52 were compliments. The departments most frequently complimented included Archives (9), Probate (9), Domestic Relations (8), Criminal Department (6), and Maywood (6).



External Department Referrals



II | SUMMARY REPORTS

During 2025 Q1, OIG closed seven CFs. Four CFs closed with summary reports. The following is a general description of the cases closed via summary report, the OIG's findings, and the basis for the findings.

CF 24-10-525

The OIG conducted an investigation into allegations that a Shakman-exempt manager (exempt manager) repeatedly discriminated against and harassed a clerk. The OIG did not find sufficient evidence to support the allegations.

First, the OIG found insufficient evidence that the exempt manager repeatedly harassed and discriminated against the clerk. The clerk claimed that the exempt manager discriminated against employees based on sex and nationality. The accused denied the allegation and no witnesses corroborated it.

Second, the OIG found insufficient evidence to uphold the claim that the exempt manager told the clerk they conducted a background check on the clerk. The exempt manager made this statement while their superior was present. The superior did not recall the statement, and the exempt manager denied the claim. The exempt manager asserted that background checks were outside their job duties.

Third, the OIG found insufficient evidence to sustain the allegation that the exempt manager raised their voice at the clerk for leaving their post. The exempt manager denied yelling at the clerk. Although an employee who was not present during the incident related that the exempt manager often spoke to staff with an attitude and did not allow employees to explain themselves, the OIG found insufficient evidence to find that the exempt manager committed misconduct during the alleged incident.

Fourth, the OIG found insufficient evidence that the exempt manager prevented the clerk from receiving assistance from another clerk. A manager redirected the other clerk from attempting to help the complainant because of instructions from the exempt manager. While a witness recalled hearing comments and apologies, others denied the incident occurred as described. A manager confirmed the other clerk was redirected due to socializing. Due to the contradictory accounts of the incident and insufficient corroborating evidence, OIG did not sustain the allegation.

The OIG likewise did not sustain the allegation that the exempt manager inappropriately questioned the clerk in front of colleagues about the clerk's purported delays in learning the department's process. Witnesses related the exempt manager was professional during the exchange. The OIG found no other evidence to corroborate the allegation.

CF 25-01-010

OIG investigated misconduct and harassment claims involving two clerks. The investigation focused on allegations of a verbal altercation, a threat of violence, and a racial comment directed at a group.

OIG sustained the allegation that Clerk #1 engaged in a verbal altercation with Clerk #2. Evidence confirmed that Clerk #1 engaged in a loud verbal disagreement with Clerk #2, which disrupted the workplace. Witnesses stated that Clerk #1 raised their voice significantly, one employee felt the need to leave their work space, and one witness recalled the use of profanity during the altercation. OIG concluded that the loud verbal altercation was a disruption to the workplace and violated Clerk's Office Code of Conduct policies.

OIG sustained the allegation that Clerk #2 threatened Clerk #1 with physical harm. OIG found that during the verbal altercation, Clerk #2 stated to Clerk #1 that they "punch a bully in the face." Several witnesses heard Clerk #2's statement about punching bullies. Clerk #2 admitted to using similar words but claimed their statement was meant as a joke. OIG found Clerk #2's explanation unpersuasive and the use of such language to violate the Clerk's Office Workplace Conduct policies.

OIG sustained the allegation that Clerk #2 told other employees that a coworker had a disability. Clerk #2 claimed they were defending their coworker from Clerk #1's bullying. The coworker found Clerk #2's involvement in "defending" them unwelcome. OIG found Clerk #2's conduct to violate workplace standards against discrimination and harassment.

Additionally, OIG substantiated claims that Clerk #1 discriminated against and bullied the coworker. The coworker described Clerk #1's behavior as abrasive and mentioned deliberately avoiding Clerk #1 to prevent confrontation and stress. Clerk #1 made derogatory remarks about the coworker's presumed disability and responded dismissively when questioned about the allegation of bullying. Witnesses recalled Clerk #1's mistreatment of their coworker. OIG determined that Clerk #1 violated the Clerk's Office Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policies as well as Workplace Violence Policies.

OIG could not substantiate the assertion that Clerk #2 used the words “them people” to refer to a specific racial group. OIG found no witnesses corroborated the allegation, and Clerk #2 denied using the phrase.

OIG recommended relocating Clerk #1 to another work area. OIG recommended that Clerk #1 and Clerk #2 attend harassment prevention training, interpersonal skills development training, and disability sensitivity training. OIG also recommended that supervisors closely monitor all involved employees to support the affected coworker and prevent any further similar incidents.

CF 25-02-057

OIG’s investigation found sufficient evidence that a Shakman-exempt manager (exempt manager) and an Administrative Assistant violated Clerk’s Office policies during a verbal altercation.

OIG sustained allegations of insubordination against the administrative assistant for disobeying the exempt manager’s directives, and sustained allegations that the administrative assistant made discriminatory remarks about women during the verbal altercation. However, OIG found insufficient evidence to sustain the allegation that the administrative assistant behaved in a threatening manner toward the exempt manager during the altercation. OIG found that the exempt manager acted in an unprofessional manner by publicly correcting their staff in front of other employees, at times without justification. However, OIG found insufficient evidence to sustain an allegation that the exempt manager engaged in retaliation.

OIG recommended that both parties participate in training programs aimed at improving communication and conflict-resolution skills. Furthermore, OIG recommended the exempt manager work on enhancing their leadership style to foster a more supportive work environment.

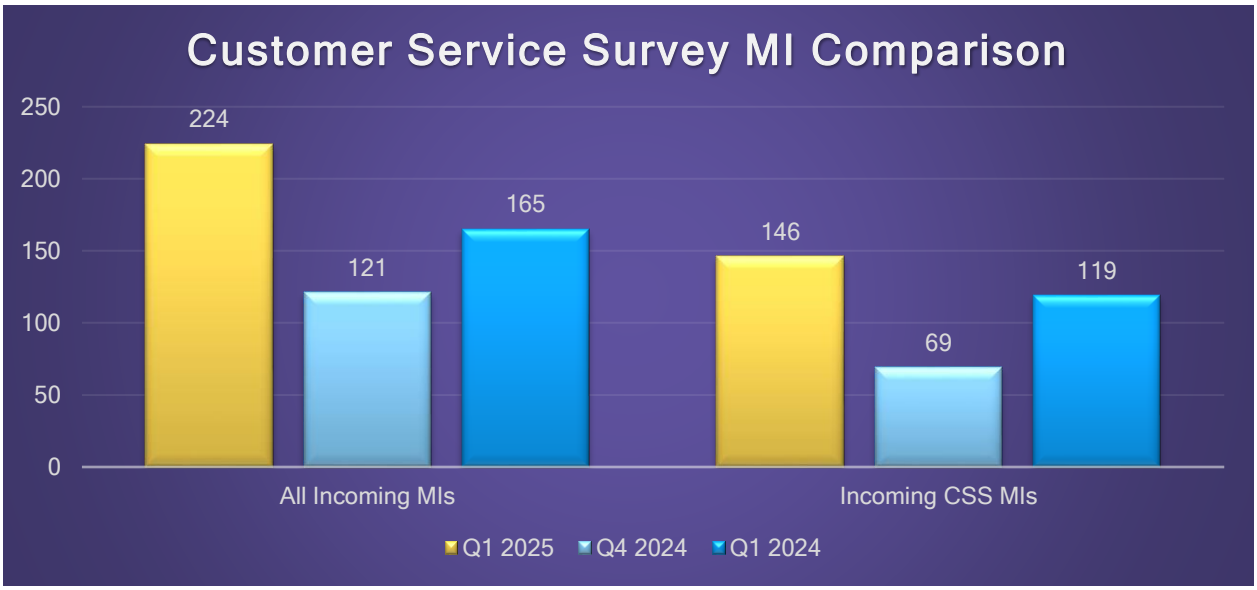
CF 25-03-214

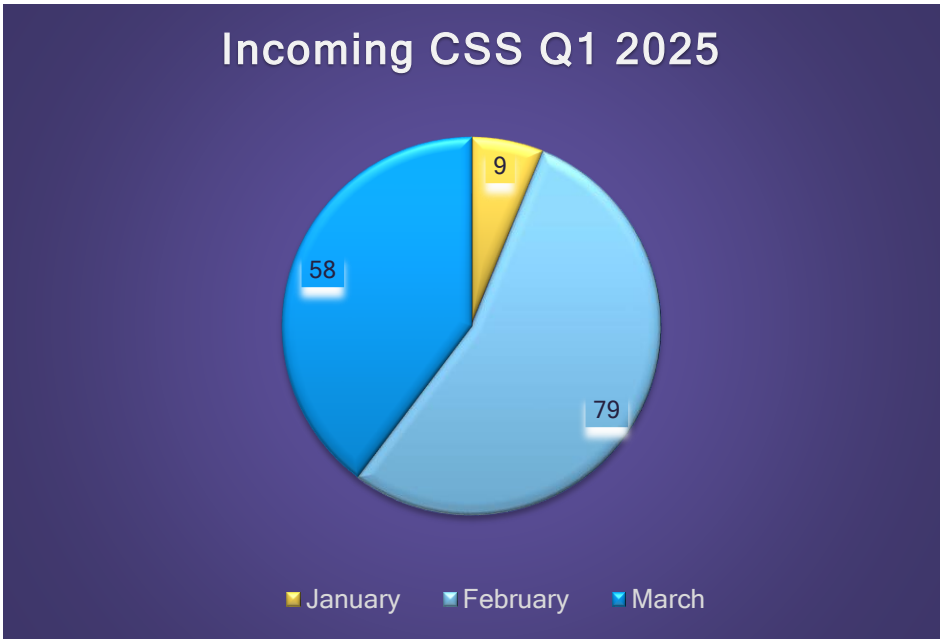
OIG received a complaint alleging that a clerk engaged in inappropriate conduct. Following its investigation, the OIG found that publicly shared videos depicted the clerk in a physical altercation with unidentified individuals on two separate occasions. Additionally, the OIG found that a post on the clerk’s social media website violated Clerk’s Office policies. On the website, the clerk identified themselves as an employee of the Clerk’s Office. One of the clerk’s posts on the website contained racially offensive language. OIG found the employee violated CCC General Rules and Policies, the Code of Ethics and Discipline Policy, and standards of conduct.

III | OIG PROJECTS

In Q1, OIG completed digitizing historical case files.

At the end of January, OIG assisted in updating the Customer Service Survey (CSS). On February 10, 2025, the CSS went live on the Clerk's website. Due to the updated launch of the CSS, OIG experienced a rise in MI intake during Q1 2025. OIG received a total of 224 MIs in Q1 2025, compared to a total of 185 MIs for Q1 2024, and 126 MIs in Q4 2024.





OIG TEAM

The OIG Team experienced significant growth and development throughout Q1. The OIG team has grown from a staff of four to a staff of six by adding three new staff members. In mid-January 2025, Katarina Durcova joined the OIG as Inspector General. In mid-March, OIG welcomed Sharon Cannon as Deputy Inspector General and Kelly Lohrenz as Executive Assistant. IG Durcova completed her certification with the Association of Inspectors General (AIG) after joining the OIG. All IG Investigators have completed their AIG certifications as both Certified Inspector General Investigators and Inspector General Inspectors/Evaluators. Deputy IG Cannon plans to complete the AIG certification at the August 2025 AIG Inspector General Institute. The OIG is currently seeking to add a fourth IG Investigator to the team.

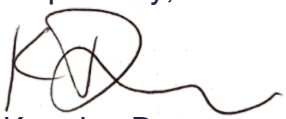
In Q2, OIG will continue to strive for the highest levels of excellence as established by the AIG. OIG plans to implement new policies and procedures and OIG staff will continue to engage in professional development, training, and education to better serve the taxpayers of Cook County.

Conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the hard work of IG Investigators Eric Perkins, Kristen Regalado, and Joanna Rangel, who have shared their knowledge and expertise through training and guiding all new staff.

Thank you for your time and attention. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this report further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Katarina Durcova
Inspector General

CC: Michael Ciaccio, Chief of Staff
James Chandler, General Counsel
Chad Gearig, Chief Human Resources Officer
Craig Wimberly, Senior Policy Advisor