



CIVIL UNIONS IN COOK COUNTY

JUNE 2011



David Orr
Cook County Clerk
July 18, 2011

CIVIL UNION SNAPSHOT

Cook County, Illinois June 2011

June 1, 2011 was the first date that County Clerks in Illinois were enabled to issue licenses for civil unions. Civil union licenses are gender-blind. That is, they are available to both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

In order to accommodate the licensing process, the office of Cook County Clerk David Orr used its internal resources to develop a new software system, which allows us to analyze data in real-time about couples seeking civil unions. This software will eventually be adopted for marriage licensing as well.

Our new system includes the demographic information we are required to collect by state law. Therefore, it provides a snapshot of who has already applied for civil union licenses in Cook County:

- ✓ 831 couples applied for civil union licenses in Cook County in June.
- ✓ The breakdown by gender was: 428 female couples (51.5%), 357 male couples (43%) and 46 opposite-sex couples (5.5%).
- ✓ About 23% of ceremonies performed for couples who obtained their licenses in June were religious ceremonies.
- ✓ More elderly male couples have obtained licenses than elderly female couples.
- ✓ More of the younger same-sex unions are female couples.
- ✓ A large number of couples have at least one partner with post-graduate studies (313) or an advanced degree (109).
- ✓ Licenses were issued to couples who live throughout Cook County, including: Evanston (35); Oak Park (24); Berwyn (8); Homewood (7) Arlington Heights (6); and Matteson (4).
- ✓ 536 couples, or 65%, were Chicago residents.

Finally, same-sex couples obtaining civil unions are ethnically diverse. At least one partner was Hispanic in 13% of female and 15% of male unions. At least one partner was African-American in 22% of female and 10% of male unions. At least one partner was Caucasian in 73% of female and 93% of male unions.

CIVIL UNIONS: THE FIRST MONTH

As of June 30, 2011, 831 couples applied for civil union licenses in Cook County. The breakdown by gender was: 428 female couples (51.5%), 357 male couples (43%) and 46 heterosexual couples (5.5%).

Because of the excitement surrounding the advent of civil unions, 209 (25%) couples applied the first day. About 39% of June licensees applied the first week (325 couples). Same-sex couples led the rush on June 1, with only 3 (1%) opposite-sex couples applying that day. But civil unions proved more popular with opposite-sex couples relative to the first day, during the remainder of June.

Day	Female	Male	Opposite	All
June 1	117	89	3	209
June 2	25	30	4	59
June 3	30	24	3	57
June 6	22	15	2	39
June 7	16	16	2	34
June 8	24	24	3	51
June 9	10	9	1	20
June 10	18	18	2	38
June 13	21	10	0	31
June 14	6	12	2	20
June 15	19	11	5	35
June 16	15	15	1	31
June 17	15	13	1	29
June 20	7	5	1	13
June 21	10	8	4	22
June 22	17	11	3	31
June 23	7	1	2	10
June 24	12	9	2	23
June 27	11	15	1	27
June 28	5	5	1	11
June 29	12	8	1	21
June 30	9	9	2	20
All June	428	357	46	831

CIVIL UNION CEREMONIES

While civil unions do not afford all of the rights of marriage, they provide a wealth of protections under state law. It is not simply a registry, like the Cook County Domestic Partnership system, which has been sunsetted. Couples must solemnize their unions with a judge or religious officiant. Our system shows that couples are not only using marriage court judges to officiate at their vows, but are also opting for traditional, religious officiants.

After a couple obtains a civil union application, they must use it within 60 days, and their officiant must return it to the Cook County Clerk's office. As of noon July 12, the civil union certificates returned to our office for couples who applied for their licenses in June break down as follows:

Couple	Certificates Returned	Civil Ceremony	Religious Ceremony
Female	292	218 (75%)	74 (25%)
Male	256	202 (79%)	54 (21%)
Opposite	32	27 (84%)	5 (16%)
All	580	447 (77%)	133 (23%)

So far, the couples most likely to use a religious officiant are the female couples, and those least likely are the opposite-sex couples. Of course, opposite-sex couples have the option to obtain a marriage license, and same-sex couples do not. Thus, different couples' motives for and outlook on obtaining civil union licenses may vary. Analysis in this area may benefit from surveying our licensees in the future.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

At least one partner in age group	Female	Male	Opposite
80+	0	5	0
70-79	3	24	2
60-69	32	72	4
50-59	106	135	11
40-49	188	182	16
30-39	189	118	19
18-29	39	86	17

While one couple may be counted in two categories, there are still evident trends:

- ✓ More elderly male couples have obtained licenses than elderly female couples.
- ✓ More of the younger same-sex unions are female couples.

The oldest person applying for a civil union was 93. The youngest permissible age is 18, and only one 18 year old applicant was recorded. There were four 19 year olds.

EDUCATION

At least one partner finished this education level	Number of Couples- All Types
Doctorate or PhD	109
Post graduate studies	313
College degree or senior in college	405
Junior in college	52
Sophomore in college or associate degree	176
Freshman in college	83
High school or equivalent	173
Junior in high school	14
Sophomore in high school	5
Freshman in high school	6
8 th grade	2
7 th grade	0
6 th grade	1
5 th grade	0
4 th grade	0
3 rd grade	0
2 nd grade	0
1 st grade	0
Kindergarten	0

It appears that couples obtaining civil union licenses are more highly educated than average¹:

- ✓ Very few couples obtaining civil unions have not completed high school.
- ✓ A large number of couples have at least one partner with either post-graduate studies (313), or a doctorate PhD (109).

Please note: One couple may be counted in more than one category.

- ✓ If both partners in a couple have a PhD, they fall under the first category (Doctorate or PhD).
- ✓ If one has a PhD and one has a college degree, they fall under two categories (Doctorate or PhD and College degree or senior in College).
- ✓ For example, there are 109 couples which include at least one Doctorate or PhD but there are 124 people with Doctorates or PhDs who applied for civil union licenses.

¹ The 2000 census for Cook County reports that 77% of the population 25 years and older graduated from high school; 28% graduated from college.

COMPARISON TO DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRY

Starting on October 1, 2003, the Cook County Clerk registered couples who were domestic partners, and wanted their partnership recognized by law. These couples were often able to obtain benefits through their employers, if one member of the couple resided in or worked in Cook County. Over the lifetime of the registry, 1978 couples registered; the last couple registered on May 30, 2011.

With the advent of civil unions, the domestic partnership registry has been closed. However, the clerk's office continues to maintain the registry. The Cook County Board of Commissioners has offered a \$20 discount on the license fee to any registered couple that obtains a civil union license by December 31, 2011.

When the civil union law was passed, it was uncertain to whom it would have most appeal—couples who were already registered as domestic partners, or others? A quick look at the numbers shows that 167 (or 20%) of the 831 couples obtaining licenses in June were previously entered into the domestic partnership registry. This suggests that civil unions have a much broader appeal than to domestic partnership registrants. Also, the vast majority of domestic partners have not yet applied for civil unions.

RACE

Because of legal barriers to marriage, there have been more stereotypes than data about same-sex couples in long-term relationships. The County Clerk’s new civil union system changes that. Just as we collect demographic data for couples who want to marry by state law, we collect it for couples applying for civil union licenses. These are some of our findings for June about ethnicity:

- ✓ At least one partner was Hispanic in 13% of female and 15% of male unions.
- ✓ At least one partner was African-American in 22% of female and 10% of male unions.
- ✓ At least one partner was Caucasian in 73% of female and 93% of male unions.

Couples	At least one partner is Hispanic	Percentage of couple type	At least one partner is African-American	Percentage of couple type	At least one partner is Caucasian	Percentage of couple type
Female couples*	56	13%	95	22%	312	73%
Male couples*	53	15%	36	10%	333	93%
Heterosexual couples*	6	13%	4	9%	38	83%

*NOTE: Couples may be counted more than once, for example, if one person identifies with more than one race, or one partner is Hispanic and the other is African-American.

GEOGRAPHY

Civil union licenses must be purchased from the county clerk in the county where the ceremony will take place.

Licenses were issued to couples who live throughout Cook County, including: in Evanston (35); Oak Park (24); Berwyn (8); Homewood (7) Arlington Heights (6); and Matteson (4). 536 couples, or 65%, were Chicago residents.

Not all of the couples obtaining civil union licenses in Cook County live in Cook County or Illinois. Already, 22 of the 831 couples obtaining civil union certificates in June were not from Illinois.

Couples from Illinois counties other than Cook who purchased their licenses in Cook County include:

County	Couples
Du Page	11
Iroquois	1
Kane	5
Kendall	1
LaSalle	2
Lake	3
Macon	2
McHenry	4
McDonough	1
Rock Island	1
Will	12

Couples do not necessarily purchase licenses close to home. Only 454 of the Chicago couples purchased their licenses in downtown Chicago. Sixty-two of them used the Skokie courthouse, and the rest went to other suburban Cook County Clerk offices. Likewise, many suburbanites availed themselves of our Loop office, likely reflecting commuting patterns.

COUNTY REVENUES

Through July 12, civil union application fees, certified civil union certificates and duplicate records had garnered over \$35,670 in new revenues for Cook County.

CONCLUSION

For the first time, Cook County Clerk David Orr's new civil union software application allows analysis of demographic data about same-sex couples in committed relationships. The current snapshot represents a subset that may have long anticipated the onset of legal unions, and therefore, the overall demographic picture may change over time.

The Cook County Clerk's office will continue to track demographic trends and revenues for civil unions over the coming year, and will publish these findings on an annual basis. When our new software system is adopted for marriage applications, we will also publish trends for married couples.