

Karen A. Yarbrough

Cook County Clerk Karen A. Yarbrough, Cook County's first African American and female Clerk, has a B.A. in Business Management from Chicago State University, an M.A. in Inner City Studies from Northeastern Illinois University, and advanced leadership studies at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Karen has served on numerous boards, enhancing the quality of life for citizens and has received many prestigious awards highlighting her advocacy, community service and legislative work.

Previously, Karen served as State Representative for the 7th District for 12 years, which included Chicago's West-Side and western suburbs. As an Assistant Majority Leader in the Illinois House of Representatives, her legislative themes were public health, public safety, and social justice. She has been a stalwart fighter to increase assistance for those incarcerated, and funding for programs that provide a "Second Chance." In 2007, Karen successfully fought the tobacco lobby as the chief sponsor of "Smoke Free Illinois" and made Illinois the first Midwestern state to go "smoke-free."

She's taken on powerful real estate interests in her pursuit of "source of income" legislation that prohibits landlords from refusing to rent to those on subsidies. She sponsored "Quality of Life," a bill using lottery money to fund groups that treat individuals with HIV-AIDS.

In 2011, Yarbrough, as chief House Sponsor helped make history by passing legislation to end the death penalty in Illinois. This legislation was signed into law by Gov. Pat Quinn making it the 16th state to do so, earning her recognition from the Pope and a Nobel Peace Prize nomination.

Karen and her husband, Henderson, have a blended family of six and share twelve grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.