



Supreme Court of Illinois

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CHIEF JUSTICE THOMAS L. KILBRIDE ANNOUNCES PILOT PROJECT FOR CAMERAS IN COURTROOM

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride announced on Tuesday that the Supreme Court has approved a policy for a pilot project to allow news cameras and electronic news recording in Illinois trial courtrooms for the first time.

The policy is effective immediately and invites the Circuit Courts in the state to apply for approval from the Supreme Court to take part in the experimental program. Once a Circuit is approved by the Supreme Court, media may request to electronically cover eligible cases in that Circuit.

"This is another step to bring more transparency and more accountability to the Illinois court system," said Chief Justice Kilbride. "The provisions of this new policy keep discretion in the chief circuit judge and the trial judge to assure that a fair and impartial trial is not compromised, yet affords a closer look at the workings of our court system to the public through the eyes of the electronic news media and news photographers.

"I am thankful to all of my fellow justices on the Court for giving a willing ear, thoughtful consideration and unanimous approval to this experiment. It is new to Illinois, but has been standard practice in many other states. I am confident that through the diligence of our chief circuit judges and our trial judges, along with the professionalism of the news media, that it may become a standard practice in our state too."

Illinois has allowed news cameras in the Supreme Court and the Illinois Appellate Court since 1983. The Illinois Supreme Court also posts audio and video of all oral arguments on its website at <http://state.il.us/court> the same day they occur. Audio of appellate court arguments also is posted on the Supreme Court's website. In addition, the Illinois Supreme Court was among the first courts in the nation to use Twitter officially to communicate word of its orders, opinions and announcements.

Until now, Illinois has been one of only 14 states where cameras in trial courtrooms were either disallowed or allowed on such a restrictive basis that they were hardly utilized.

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The new policy, while unique to Illinois, is modeled after some of the provisions contained in the Iowa Rules for Expanded Media Coverage. In the policy, the electronic camera and audio coverage is described as "extended media coverage."

The Illinois policy gives absolute discretion to the trial judge on whether to allow extended media coverage of a proceeding, notwithstanding a request by the news media. Consistent with Article VI, Section 7 (c) of the Illinois Constitution which grants supervisory authority to the chief judge over his circuit, the policy also gives discretion to the chief judge to disallow coverage.

The policy provides that the media, through a media coordinator, must request extended media coverage at least 14 days in advance of the time the proceeding is scheduled, although the time frame may be expanded or reduced by the judge. It allows for no more than two video cameras and no more than two still photographers. It encourages media pooling in all regards, and requires media pooling when there are more media requesting extended coverage than the number the judge allows.

In the case of a media member promising coverage of a proceeding from beginning to end, that member of the media shall receive priority consideration for placing its equipment in the courtroom. If the media cannot agree among themselves on the pooling arrangements, extended media coverage will be disallowed.

The policy allows for a witness or a party to object to a request for extended media coverage, but it is not intended that such objection, while in the discretion of the judge, will be automatically granted.

In prosecutions for sexual abuse, or when sexual abuse is an essential element, there will be no extended media coverage of the testimony of a victim unless the testifying victim consents. An objection to extended media coverage by a testifying victim in any other forcible felony prosecution, and by police informants, undercover agents and relocated witnesses shall be presumed valid.

The policy also prohibits media coverage in any juvenile, divorce, adoption, child custody, evidence suppression and trade secret cases, as well as in any court proceeding required under Illinois law to be held in private.

Extended media coverage of jury selection, the jury and individual jurors also is prohibited under the policy. Any decision by a chief judge or judge to deny, limit or terminate extended media coverage is not appealable.

A copy of the entire policy with its provisions is available at the Supreme Court's website at <http://state.il.us/court>.

The allowance of electronic coverage on an experimental basis in Illinois trial courtrooms is the most recent innovation approved by the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Kilbride.

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Since he was selected Chief Justice by his colleagues in October 2010, the Supreme Court has approved several initiatives to bring Illinois courts into the digital age, making them more efficient and accessible.

These have included the allowance of e-filing on an experimental basis in the Supreme Court, making an electronic trial record available in the 2nd and 4th Appellate Districts in cases from Adams, DuPage and Ogle counties; moving to a public domain citation system of Appellate and Supreme Court cases; and posting online the Pattern Jury Instructions for civil and criminal cases in Illinois.

In addition, at the recommendation of Chief Justice Kilbride, the Supreme Court established a Special Committee on E-Business which, among other things, is charged with continuing to recommend ways to expand e-filing in the Circuit Courts in Illinois.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.2323)