



Supreme Court of Illinois

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SUPREME COURT APPROVES CAMERAS FOR CRIMINAL CASES IN KANKAKEE COUNTY

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Illinois Supreme Court and Chief Judge Kathy Bradshaw Elliott of the 21st Judicial Circuit announced Friday that news cameras will be allowed in criminal trial courts in Kankakee County under a pilot program approved by the Supreme Court earlier this year.

The 21st Circuit becomes the second circuit in Illinois approved by the Court for cameras in the courtroom and will join the 14th Judicial Circuit where extended media coverage has already been implemented under the experimental program.

"I am very pleased that Chief Judge Elliott has applied and has been approved by the Supreme Court to take part in the project," said Chief Justice Kilbride. "I'm informed that the Chief Judge has met with stakeholders in the courtrooms and that they, too, have expressed not only their interest but their enthusiasm for the program.

"The pilot program has been proceeding in the Quad Cities area with the cooperation of the media, judges, courtroom and county personnel for more than a month," said Chief Justice Kilbride. "This will be another step to see if we can carefully balance the goals of greater openness and access with the guaranteed rights of defendants and parties to have fair proceedings."

The 21st Circuit is comprised of Kankakee and Iroquois counties, but for now Chief Judge Elliott asked that the experimental program proceed only in the criminal courts in Kankakee County to provide a model before it is expanded to other courtrooms in the circuit.

"My fellow judges and I look forward to working with the media and the Illinois Supreme Court as this project moves forward," said Chief Judge Elliott. "Cameras in the courtroom will increase public awareness about the judicial system. This will enable the public to have a more realistic view of what occurs in court as opposed to what is shown in so-called reality TV shows.

"Cameras will add transparency to the judicial process, although that has been available in all of the courtrooms which have been open to the public," Chief Judge Elliott added. "With the media's assistance and cooperation, we hope to be able to provide the public with a deeper understanding of the court process."

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Chief Judge Elliott said she is planning to meet with representatives of the media as well as other courtroom principals such as the state's attorney, public defender, Kankakee County Board president, sheriff and court administrators.

"We are pleased to have been chosen as one of the pilot project sites, and our priority is to put the pilot program into effect as soon as may be possible," she said.

The Order approving Kankakee County in the 21st Circuit requires that a judge presiding over a proceeding in which cameras were allowed file a report with the chief judge of the circuit, the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court Justice of the of the district where the judicial circuit is located.

Chief Justice Kilbride announced on January 24 the Supreme Court's approval of an experimental program to allow news media cameras and audio in trial courtrooms. The Supreme Court has allowed cameras to broadcast its own oral arguments, and those of the Illinois Appellate Court, since 1983. At that time, however, the Court specifically rejected allowing news cameras during trial proceedings, and the issue made little headway until Chief Justice Kilbride and his fellow justices took another look.

Under the policy already in effect in the 14th Circuit, which is comprised of Henry, Mercer, Rock Island and Whiteside counties in the Quad Cities area, cameras have been allowed in four proceedings, and Chief Judge Jeffrey W. O'Connor has also granted a request by the media that they be allowed in a trial scheduled for June in Whiteside County for an accused murderer.

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