



Supreme Court of Illinois

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SUPREME COURT APPROVES CAMERAS FOR COURTS IN TWO NORTHERN ILLINOIS COUNTIES

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Illinois Supreme Court and Chief Judge Joseph G. McGraw of the 17th Judicial Circuit formally announced Monday that news cameras will be allowed in trial courtrooms in Boone and Winnebago counties under a pilot program approved by the Supreme Court earlier this year.

Chief Justice Kilbride made an initial announcement Saturday evening during his keynote address before the Illinois News Broadcasters Association's spring convention held in Macomb.

With the Supreme Court's Order filed April 30, the 17th Circuit joins Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle and Stephenson counties in the 15th Judicial Circuit, Madison County in the Third Judicial Circuit, Kankakee County in the 21st Judicial Circuit and Henry, Mercer, Rock Island and Whiteside counties in the 14th Judicial Circuit where extended media coverage was approved earlier by the Supreme Court. The Order is effective immediately.

"The 17th Circuit is home to Rockford, the third largest city in Illinois, with four network affiliate television stations and a regional daily newspaper included in its media market," Chief Justice Kilbride said. "There are also numerous smaller newspaper and radio stations that can now provide the opportunity to have audio and photo coverage of the courts for their listeners and readers."

"As the pilot project progresses with another judicial circuit's participation, it is paramount to remember that the most important issue is to continue to balance carefully the goals of greater openness and access with dignity for the process and the guaranteed rights of all to a fair trial."

Approval of the 17th Circuit extends the pilot project even further into the Second Judicial District, joining five counties in the 15th Judicial Circuit that were recently approved for coverage by the Court.

"The 17th Circuit has an admirable history of being in the forefront of programs designed to enhance the administration of justice in Illinois," said Justice Robert R. Thomas, whose Second Judicial District includes the 15th and 17th circuits.

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"It helped begin a lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring program for new attorneys with the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism and was instrumental in ensuring the success of the alternate dispute resolution program. I am pleased that Chief Judge McGraw and the judges in the 17th Circuit are continuing that tradition and embracing the pilot project for cameras in the courtroom."

Chief Judge McGraw said he and the judges in the 17th circuit are committed to the success of the program that would bring an additional opportunity to assess the pilot project from another perspective.

"Boone and Winnebago counties are comprised of a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas," Chief Judge McGraw said. "By allowing extended media coverage in our jurisdiction, the High Court may be afforded with additional and varied program assessment information.

"Our court staff has developed a positive working relationship with various media representatives, and we welcome the collaboration of the news media to develop local protocols and implement a successful program."

Winnebago County State's Attorney Joseph P. Bruscato also supports the pilot project, Chief Judge McGraw said.

The Supreme Court order approving the 17th Circuit requires that a judge presiding over a proceeding in which cameras or audio are allowed must file a report with the chief judge of the circuit, the Chief Justice and Justice Thomas.

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.

The 14th Judicial Circuit in northwestern Illinois was the first to be approved for cameras. Chief Judge Jeffrey W. O'Connor of the 14th Circuit already has implemented a policy and cameras have been allowed in several proceedings there. Chief Judge O'Connor also has granted a request by the media for camera coverage of a trial scheduled June 11 in Whiteside County for a defendant accused of murder.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, director of communications to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.2323)