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**CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERT R. THOMAS ANNOUNCES E-BUSINESS  
INITIATIVE FOR ILLINOIS COURTS**

Chief Justice Robert R. Thomas and the Illinois Supreme Court announced Friday a wide-ranging plan to build a technological infrastructure that would link electronically all the courts in the state's 23 judicial circuits and 102 counties.

Once completed, the plan would provide, among several features, a uniform system for the electronic filing of cases and case documents in all of the state's trial courts. It also would bring together, under a uniform structure, other electronic business initiatives which the Court has allowed previously.

Under Chief Justice Thomas, the Court has increasingly embraced new technologies and implemented a range of e-business initiatives. These include electronic digital imaging of court documents; and the electronic submission of guilty pleas in minor traffic and conservation offenses which, along with e-filing, have been undertaken on a pilot basis in some of the trial courts.

Unlike the federal court system, in the Illinois trial courts, there is no uniform case management system and thus, implementing an e-filing system like the one that is utilized in the federal courts is not possible.

Chief Justice Thomas said that this statewide initiative is the next logical step in the continued progression of maximizing the use of the latest technology in the Illinois courts. He noted that there were more than 4.4 million new cases filed in Illinois trial courts alone in 2007.

"I am very pleased to announce these plans for a statewide e-business initiative in the Illinois courts," said Chief Justice Thomas. "The implementation will require an immense effort, but the benefits in more effectively and efficiently administering the ends of justice will be well worth it for all Illinois citizens."

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The new, wide-ranging e-business initiatives are being undertaken as part of the Supreme Court's constitutional supervisory authority over the administration of the state's courts, and will be implemented by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and its Director, Cynthia Y. Cobbs.

Chief Justice Thomas said the Administrative Office has conducted an analysis of critical information gleaned from the experiences in other states, vendors and the pilot projects underway in some of the Illinois judicial circuits. He said the Court believes the time is right to invest in a statewide infrastructure that will aid in the efficient and effective delivery of justice.

E-filing is the process of submitting court documents via the Internet, rather than on paper, and receiving an electronic response from the court about the status of the filing. It also allows parties, through their attorneys, to pay filing fees, notify other parties, receive court notices and retrieve court information electronically. E-filing generally is considered far more efficient than paper filing and can result in savings to the courts and litigants. In addition to e-filing, the Supreme Court also has authorized the submission of electronic pleas of guilty in minor traffic and conservation cases.

The new initiative would increase e-filing, e-guilty pleas and develop other e-business programs for all the judicial circuits. In addition, it would develop a data warehouse containing a broad scope of information that could be shared among courts, probation, law enforcement officials and other entities, Chief Justice Thomas said.

At the heart of the plan is the development of an Illinois Judicial Branch portal using web-based technologies. Just as a portal like Yahoo or Google provides access to a myriad of information, the Illinois judicial portal would provide a single point for access to a broad scope of case information collected from cases filed in all 102 Illinois counties. The initiative would not relieve judicial circuits of their record-keeping responsibility, but the portal would provide a central point of access to trial court information and a single system to distribute trial court data to federal and state entities.

"A critical component to the success of this project is the establishment of statewide technology standards that will allow the integration of the 23 judicial circuits' information systems into a common link," said Ms. Cobbs, the AOIC director. "The use of a central judicial branch portal, and the establishment of standards will ensure that Illinois' use of technology to assist in the work of the courts is secure, uniform, and cohesive, rather than a patchwork of independent services."

The AOIC has been working with several national vendors to identify technologies that would implement a database platform, a statewide network and associated standards to support the e-business initiative. Director Cobbs and her staff also will be working with the Chief Judges of the 23 circuits, as well as with county officials to plan and implement the initiative as seamlessly as possible. Director Cobbs also said that interested parties can view the Supreme Court's home web page which provides a hyper-link to descriptions of the current programs and locations of electronic business initiatives in Illinois' trial courts ([www.state.il.us/court](http://www.state.il.us/court)).

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**Chief Justice Thomas Announces E-Business Initiative  
Add Two**

A time frame for full implementation of uniform statewide e-filing and other e-business is uncertain, but it is expected to be phased in over a period of three to five years. The cost of development will be funded through judicial branch resources, and other sources of funding will have to be identified as needed.

The e-business initiative is the most recent reflection of the strides made by the Court during the three-year tenure of Chief Justice Thomas in the identification and implementation of information technologies in the courts while ensuring sound procedural and privacy protections. All these changes will have a continuing impact on the courts, litigants and their attorneys in the years to come. The most visible improvements in electronic technology is the availability of the Court's oral arguments in video and audio format on an improved Court website.

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