



Supreme Court of Illinois

Joseph R. Tybor
Press Secretary

222 North LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601
Telephone (312) 793-2323
Mobile (312) 636-0479
Fax (312) 793-0871

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SUPREME COURT APPROVES CAMERAS IN CRIMINAL COURTS IN MADISON COUNTY

Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Illinois Supreme Court and Chief Judge Ann Callis of the Third Judicial Circuit announced Thursday that news cameras will be allowed in the criminal trial courts in Madison County under a pilot program approved by the Supreme Court earlier this year.

The Third Circuit follows the 14th Judicial Circuit in the Quad Cities area where extended media coverage has already been implemented under the experimental program, as well as the 21st Circuit which received approval last week for allowing news cameras at criminal trials in Kankakee County.

“I congratulate Chief Judge Callis for moving her circuit forward in this experimental program,” said Chief Justice Kilbride. “Madison County and the surrounding area is known for a vibrant and energetic brand of media. Because of its proximity to St. Louis, it will provide the pilot program with input from metropolitan TV and radio stations, who are already accustomed to camera coverage in Missouri courts.

“The pilot program is proceeding in the 14th Circuit where still or video cameras have already recorded actual court proceedings in Rock Island, Henry and Whiteside counties. In the 21st Circuit, Chief Judge Kathy Bradshaw Elliott has met with media in the Kankakee and Chicago area and expects to implement camera coverage shortly. As the pilot project goes forward in another geographical area of the state, 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 defendants to a fair trial.”

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Lloyd Karmeier, whose Fifth Judicial District includes the Third Circuit, also looked forward to the unfolding of the pilot project in Madison County.

“This is an important step in determining whether the camera and recording policy the Supreme Court has put into effect will be workable in Illinois,” said Justice Karmeier who voted with his colleagues 7-0 to approve the experimental program. “Success will be measured by whether the news media with their electronic equipment can co-exist with the principles of a fair proceeding. The initiative of Chief Judge Callis to bring cameras to Madison County will be a helpful test of the project in a different and diverse area of the state.”

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The Third Circuit is comprised of Madison and Bond counties, but extended media coverage will be allowed under the pilot project only for now in the Madison County Criminal Justice Center in Edwardsville.

“Our Criminal Justice Center is a modern, electronically equipped building providing wireless access that will facilitate accessibility by the media,” said Chief Judge Callis. “It has sufficient security safeguards to ensure this project can be managed efficiently, while serving the public effectively.

“I am pleased that the Third Circuit was chosen by the Supreme Court to take part in the experimental cameras program. I believe it will be beneficial not only to the courts, but also to the public as citizens can see first-hand how our justice system works. We’re prepared to follow the policy established by the Supreme Court and to coordinate with all the parties involved in the justice system, and the media, to provide a smooth transition to greater media and, hence, public access.”

As the pilot project unfolds in criminal courtrooms in Madison County, Chief Judge Callis she also would explore the feasibility of requesting permission to expand the program to other courthouses in the circuit.

The Order approving Madison County criminal courts for the pilot project 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 Justice Karmerier.

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 Supreme Court has provided its own three-camera video and audio coverage of all its oral arguments since January 2008, and posts them on the Court’s website the same day they are heard at <http://www.state.il.us/court>. Audio coverage of oral arguments in the Illinois Appellate Court is also available on the Court’s website.

Under the extended media coverage policy as it is being implemented 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 at least five proceedings. Chief Judge Jeffrey W. O’Connor has also granted a request by the media that cameras and audio be allowed in a trial scheduled for June in Whiteside County for a defendant accused of murder.

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