

Hinds Circuit and County Courts to begin e-filing Oct. 1

September 26, 2013

Hinds Circuit Court and Hinds County Court will begin accepting voluntary electronic filing of court documents in civil cases on Oct. 1, according to an order signed this week by Senior Circuit Judge Tomie Green. E-filing will become mandatory on Nov. 1 in civil cases.

Clay County Chancery Court also will begin voluntary e-filing Oct. 1. The Clay County Circuit Court implemented mandatory e-filing Aug. 1. Montgomery County Chancery Court began voluntary e-filing Sept. 16.

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. said, "The addition of Hinds Circuit and County Courts to the Mississippi Electronic Courts system marks a milestone in our efforts to implement a unified, statewide e-filing system for the judiciary. The state's most populous county, the home of our capital city and the seat of state government, is an essential component of a unified records system."

Chief Justice Waller said, "Circuit Clerk Barbara Dunn and her staff are commended for the responsive and professional manner in which they have implemented e-filing in Hinds County Circuit Court."

Dunn said that attorneys with whom she has spoken seem excited about e-filing. "We are trying to make this as simple as possible," she said.

Chief Justice Waller welcomed Clay and Montgomery counties to the MEC system. "Each county that becomes a part of the electronic filing system improves the efficiency of our judicial system and the accessibility of our courts to all of our citizens," Chief Justice Waller said.

With the addition of Hinds Circuit and County Courts to the MEC system, e-filing will be utilized in 20 courts in 12 counties. Several more counties are expected to be ready to e-file in the near future, said MEC Director Lisa Counts.

Judge Green said she has eagerly awaited the availability of e-filing technology. She expressed appreciation to Chief Justice Waller for pushing the implementation of e-filing for Hinds County. "He long ago recognized that we needed this throughout the state," she said.

The Mississippi Electronic Courts program, under the supervision of the Mississippi Supreme Court, is adapted from the electronic filing system used in federal district courts. Judges and attorneys may file and view documents 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Judge Green said that electronic filing will save time and money for lawyers and litigants by reducing the expense of postage and trips to the courthouse to file or review documents. E-filing will enable judges to more easily track cases and manage their dockets more efficiently. And having instant electronic access to records rather than pulling paper files off a shelf is expected to improve work flow and speed up the process of issuing decisions and orders.

"This gives us information quicker so that we can look at a file and make decisions based on what is in the file and what has already been done. Hopefully this will fast-track cases toward resolution so that the litigants don't have to wait for things to manually be done," Judge Green said.

Judge Green noted that e-filing will start with civil cases only. She said that she expects the system to be expanded to criminal cases soon.

Judge Green said, “There’s not enough that can be said about joining the 21st Century. The technology is here. The security systems are in place to protect the litigants. It’s time for Hinds County to move forward.”

Chief Justice Waller said that he looks forward to Rankin Circuit and County Courts implementing e-filing by January 2014. That will make e-filing available across the metro Jackson area. Madison County was the first MEC pilot project county. E-filing was implemented in Madison Chancery Court in 2009 and in civil cases in Madison Circuit and County Courts in 2010.

“Almost 50 percent of the lawyers in this state live in Hinds, Rankin or Madison counties,” Chief Justice Waller said.

E-filing trial court jurisdictions currently include the Clay County Circuit Court and Chancery Courts in Desoto, Grenada, Hinds, Holmes, Montgomery, Rankin, Webster and Yazoo counties. In Madison, Harrison and Warren counties, all trial courts – Chancery, Circuit and County Courts – use e-filing.

The Mississippi Supreme Court and Court of Appeals began accepting voluntary electronic filing of briefs and motions July 1. The Supreme Court Clerk’s office has received more than 900 electronic filings since July 1, said Clerk of Courts Kathy Gillis. E-filing will become mandatory for briefs and motions in the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals on Jan. 1, 2014.

More than 3,500 attorneys – nearly half of the approximately 7,200 attorneys in the state – are registered to use the MEC system. Also, more than 1,300 non-attorneys are currently registered to use the system to access court records.

Free training for attorneys and their staff is provided by MEC at the Supreme Court Courthouse, 450 High Street in Jackson, and in the venues in which e-filing is implemented. The next scheduled training sessions at the Supreme Court are set for Oct. 14 at 9 a.m. and Oct. 29 at 1 p.m. Training sessions will be conducted in Starkville at the Bost Building on the Mississippi State University campus at 1:30 p.m. Oct. 30 and 8:30 a.m. Oct. 31.

Online registration is available at this link: http://courts.ms.gov/mec/mec_attorney_training.html.

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