

Lamar County Circuit Court to begin e-filing May 30

May 26, 2017

Electronic filing of court documents will become mandatory in Lamar County Circuit Court on May 30. Voluntary electronic filing began May 22.

Lamar County's move to the Mississippi Electronic Courts system means that electronic filing is utilized district-wide in the 15th Circuit Court District in civil cases. Circuit Courts in Jefferson Davis, Lawrence, Marion and Pearl River counties already use electronic filing for civil cases.

Work has begun in Lamar, Marion and Pearl River County Circuit Courts to allow them to utilize e-filing in criminal cases, according to Catherine Horton, project director for Mississippi Electronic Courts. E-filing is expected to begin in criminal cases by late summer.

Senior Circuit Judge Prentiss Harrell has looked forward to having e-filing in use across the entire 15th Circuit District. "We are going district-wide and I'm so happy," he said.

"From a time standpoint and an economic standpoint, it's invaluable," Judge Harrell said. "It saves us an enormous amount of money from not having to travel to get files." The five-county district stretches from New Hebron to the Louisiana line.

Electronic access means judges and staff are better able to manage court dockets district-wide. Judges, court staff and attorneys can access case dockets and documents 24 hours a day, seven days a week from any location with Internet access. Judges and attorneys can file documents at any time via the Internet.

Judge Harrell also looks forward to the convenience of sending records electronically to the Supreme Court when cases are appealed. He recalled the preparation and submission of an appeal by attorneys after an oil and gas trial that lasted nine weeks. When the appeal record was filed, "they rented a U-haul truck and carried the record" to the Supreme Court in Jackson.

Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich of Hattiesburg is looking forward to Forrest County Circuit Court's expected move to civil electronic filing in the near future. Perry County Circuit Court began mandatory e-filing of civil cases on March 6. The 12th Circuit District includes Forrest and Perry counties.

"It's a big help to be able to review the files from your desk," Judge Helfrich said.

Chancery Courts in Forrest, Lamar and Perry counties already use electronic filing in the MEC system.

Other courts that recently moved to mandatory e-filing using the MEC system are the Simpson County Chancery Court, effective May 8, and the Jones County Chancery Court, effective April 25.

Statewide, 73 courts utilize the MEC system for e-filing and docket management. That includes 50 chancery courts, 15 circuit courts and eight county courts.

MEC Director Lisa Counts said, "Many more courts want to use MEC and are awaiting implementation. We are moving as fast as our staff and resources allow."

A large portion of attorneys who practice law in the state are registered to use MEC. As of May 26, the MEC system had 6,431 attorney users and 3,856 non-attorney users.

Attorneys gain extra work hours to file documents, Lamar County Circuit Clerk Martin Hankins pointed out. Although the clerk's office closes at 5 p.m., attorneys are able to timely file documents electronically up to midnight. Attorneys began using the MEC filing system as soon as voluntary e-filing became available May 22 in Lamar County Circuit Court.

"I think it is going to be a great system," Hankins said. We are continuing to learn in our office and adapt to the changes. It's going well."

MEC staff will conduct training for attorneys and their staff on June 8 in Purvis. Two sessions are set for 9:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Hankins said the training will be conducted in the County Courtroom upstairs at the Chancery Courthouse.

Register for MEC training at this link: https://courts.ms.gov/Newsite2/mec/mec_attorney_training_mailform.php.

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