

**OFFICE UPDATE FROM
THURSTON COUNTY CLERK**
(The Legal Brief – May 2013)

Going Paperless...?

On March 18, our office made an exciting announcement that, effective April 1, 2013, we would no longer have paper files at the Family & Juvenile Court. As many of you have witnessed, we have been making the transition to paperless files for quite some time. We began imaging all of our documents in 1999, in preparation of a future we envisioned. That future included digital images of court files and electronic services for the public. One small step in this direction took place when we no longer provided paper files for viewing, but rather provided terminals where individuals could review the files. If you can believe it, that was in 1997!

We have come a long way since then. In launching eCommerce and eFiling, we are seeing the dramatic rewards of providing electronic services. Our office has become somewhat of a “self-serve” office, where people can conduct their business electronically from the comfort of their homes or offices during times which are suitable for them. With the reduction of so many staff over the years, and facing additional staff losses, this is vital for the survival of our office and the services we provide.

Since 2005, we have been planning, researching, and preparing to provide electronic calendars to the judicial officers. Now, we are nearing the end of our goal of becoming an electronic court. Judicial officers have been utilizing “online” calendars since 2009, and for some, we have not been providing the paper files for the purposes of conducting court.

There seemed to be some confusion and concern about what it meant for our office to no longer have paper files. As a result of the questions and concerns, the Clerk’s Office and the Court held two stakeholder’s meetings and invited members of the local bar, their support staff, and other legal support professionals to come and have a conversation about the impact of this transition.

The first meeting was used as a forum for people to simply ask their questions and let us know what their concerns were. At the second meeting, our office provided answers and responses to those questions. We were pleased that most of the questions and issues raised were items we had already worked through and adequately addressed; undoubtedly a result of the many years of planning and preparation by our office. We would like to sincerely thank each and every one of you that attended and participated in those very important meetings. It is very much appreciated that the members of our legal community are so vested in the system.

There will be an adjustment period for all while navigating our new processes, but we remain committed to keeping you informed with our progress and providing you with the information you need to keep moving forward...with us.

Filing New Cases for Ex Parte – FJC Only

With our new electronic process in place, it has become clear that more time is needed for our office to process new case filings if you are appearing for the ex parte calendars. Because we are not providing paper files, we no longer hand files to attorneys to take with them to the courtroom. Instead, we are scanning the documents so they may be provided to the judicial officer in electronic form.

To that end, we are asking that if you need to open a new case prior to the ex parte calendar, please arrive at our office no later than 3:30. If you frequently go through the ex parte process where you are opening a new case, please consider signing up for eFiling. You can now open new cases and pay the associated filing fees from our website. Once you have completed the testing phase for eFiling, you will receive a user guide which outlines how to file new cases. There is a small fee associated with processing the payment for filing fees, however, we believe that the benefits of not having to travel to the courthouse, wait in lines at the front counter, and being able to go straight to the courtroom far outweigh the minimal fee.

Dismissal Eligibility List

I would like to remind everyone that you can view our “Dismissal Eligibility List” from our website. This list allows you to search for any case that you are the attorney of record and that has been stagnant without any activity for one year or more. You can then take the appropriate action to dispose of the case and avoid the \$30.00 fee for our office to process the case closure. To locate the list, click the “Dismissal Eligibility List” link from our home page and scroll all the way to the bottom of the page and click the highlighted month.

As always, we welcome suggestions for topics that you would like me to address in an upcoming issue.

THURSTON COUNTY CLERK’S OFFICE

Yvonne L. Pettus

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