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Courts Selected for Federal Cameras in Court Pilot Study

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Fourteen federal trial courts have been selected to take part in the federal Judiciary's digital video pilot, which will begin July 18, 2011, and will evaluate the effect of cameras in courtrooms. All 14 courts volunteered to participate in the three-year experiment.

The courts were selected by the Committee on Court Administration and Case Management (CACM) of the Judicial Conference of the United States in consultation with the Federal Judicial Center, the Judiciary's research arm. The participating courts are:

Middle District of Alabama
Northern District of California
Southern District of Florida
District of Guam
Northern District of Illinois
Southern District of Iowa
District of Kansas
District of Massachusetts
Eastern District of Missouri
District of Nebraska
Northern District of Ohio
Southern District of Ohio
Western District of Tennessee
Western District of Washington

The pilot will provide for participation by more than 100 U.S. District judges, including judges who favor cameras in court and those who are skeptical of them.

Districts volunteering for the pilot must follow guidelines (pdf) adopted by CACM. The pilot is limited to civil proceedings in which the parties have consented to recording.

No proceedings may be recorded without the approval of the presiding judge, and parties must consent to the recording of each proceeding in a case. The recordings will be made publicly available on www.uscourts.gov and on local participating court websites at the court's discretion.

The pilot recordings will not be simulcast, but will be made available as soon as possible. The presiding judge can choose to stop a recording if it is necessary, for example, to protect the rights of the parties and witnesses, preserve the dignity of the court, or choose not to post the video for public view. Coverage of the prospective jury during voir dire is prohibited, as is coverage of jurors or alternate jurors.

Electronic media coverage of criminal proceedings in federal courts has been expressly prohibited under Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 53 since the criminal rules were adopted in 1946, and by the Judicial Conference since 1972. In 1996 the Conference rescinded its camera coverage prohibition for courts of appeals, and allowed each appellate court discretion to permit broadcasting of oral arguments. To date, two courts of appeals—the Second and the Ninth—allow such coverage. In the early 1990s the Judicial Conference conducted a pilot program permitting electronic media coverage of civil proceeding in six district courts and two courts of appeals.