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WGN

Cameras to record federal civil cases in Chicago

Pilot program includes 14 districts around the country

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CHICAGO

A three-year pilot program will put cameras in courtrooms around the country -- including Chicago -- to record federal civil case trials.

The Judicial Conference of the United States approved cameras in 14 different districts around the country including northern California, Massachusetts and at the Dirksen Federal Building in Chicago, which is the largest of the courts to participate.

As of Wednesday, the technology was in place. Three cameras are shooting directly at three spots in the courtroom: the witness box; the podium, where the lawyers address the court; and at the bench where the judge sits. Judges may choose not to have their faces broadcast, and the jury will never be shown.

Another big difference here in Chicago is that the video will not be streaming live to the public. It will be saved on a network and can be accessed on the Northern District's website after the fact. It also can be edited by the courts if there is some reason not to show a particular witness or an event that played out in court. The judge makes the final call.

These are possibly baby steps to seeing cameras in the courtroom more regularly. It's possible criminal cases could one day be videotaped, but for now, the federal court clerk says there is still a lot to learn before we get there.

For more information, visit www.uscourts.gov and www.ilnd.uscourts.gov.

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