



## Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

# News

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### **First electronic document filed in Jefferson County Circuit Court**

For immediate release

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CHARLES TOWN, W.Va. – Attorney Stephen Skinner of the Skinner Law Firm filed the first electronic document in Jefferson County Circuit Court shortly after 10 a.m. on Monday, April 20, making Jefferson County the second county in West Virginia to have electronic filing of circuit court documents.

It took only a few minutes for Circuit Clerk Laura Storm to be able to see a notice of the filing and then the full document on a laptop she had set up in a circuit court courtroom in the Jefferson County Judicial Annex for the public and media to see.

“I can push a button and they get filed and served on other lawyers, in Charleston and Seattle,” said Mr. Skinner, who also is a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates from Jefferson County.

“It’s fantastic,” Mr. Skinner said. “We’ve been using electronic filing in federal courts and other courts for a long time. The system they have developed here is one of the most simple, easiest that I have ever seen.”

Electronically filing documents rather than filing them in person at the circuit clerk’s office saves lawyers time and money, because they do not have to travel to the courthouse in person to file documents or make multiple paper copies that have to be stamped received by a circuit clerk. Those cost savings can be passed on to clients, Mr. Skinner said.

Electronic filing also allows attorneys to file documents when weather may prevent traveling to a courthouse in person. It also allows judges who work in multiple counties to access case files from any location, said Twenty-Third Judicial Circuit (Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan Counties) Judge John C. Yoder.

Ms. Storm said the system also saves her employees time to file and move paper files from the clerk’s office to court and back. Eventually electronic files will eliminate the need for storage of paper court files, freeing up space now used for storage in court facilities.

The West Virginia Judiciary’s Unified Electronic Filing system was established through amendments to the West Virginia Trial Court Rules, effective May 1, 2014. The

rules incorporated a pilot project that began in August 2013 when Marion County became the first county to have electronic filing of circuit court records.

Jefferson County is the second county to go online. Supreme Court Justice Brent D. Benjamin was present in both counties when the first documents were filed there electronically. Those working on the new system are learning from each launch and making adjustments that are being incorporated as the system moves on to other counties, he said.

Currently, only attorneys can file documents electronically, but public access terminals in Marion and Jefferson County circuit clerk offices' are available to view documents. Eventually, the public also will be able to file documents electronically and see them from any computer anywhere, said Matt Arrowood, Director of the Supreme Court's Division of Circuit Clerk Services, which oversees the electronic filing system.

Public documents that have been scanned from previous years (more than a million documents dating from the 1930s to the present in Jefferson County alone) as well as those filed every day at circuit clerk's offices will be available online in a PDF format.

A committee is studying the cost of the new system and will determine what a reasonable filing fee and user fee should be once the system is expanded statewide. The system will be paid for by the users, not by taxpayers.

The Supreme Court is paying for the upgrade in technology in all circuit clerks offices.

E-filing is used in circuit courts only. The unified judicial application (UJA) serves magistrate courts. The two systems currently are running parallel. Once both are operational in every county, the systems will communicate and will make the transition of case information between magistrate and circuit clerks offices seamless.

Currently, the UJA is operating in 35 magistrate courts and new locations are converted every six weeks. The UJA LEO (Case Search & Active Warrant Search) is already operational statewide and provides law enforcement and 911 dispatch centers instant access to magistrate court records and outstanding warrants.

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