

S.J. C. Rule 1:19 Electronic Access to the Courts

Fact Sheet

Summary of major rule changes, effective on September 17, 2012

- The news media are defined as those who are regularly engaged in the reporting and publishing of news or information about matters of public interest. This includes citizen journalists who meet this standard.
- The rule allows the news media with permission of the court to use laptop computers, tablets, smart phones and other mobile electronic devices in the courtroom as long as they are not disruptive to the proceedings. This means that live blogging would be allowed.
- The rule requires that news media register with the Public Information Office in order to use cameras and technology in courts. No registration is required of news media to cover courts without cameras or technology. Those registering must confirm that they meet the definition of news media and agree to follow the rule.
- If a member of the news media has not registered with the Public Information Office, a judge has the discretion to permit electronic access.
- For photography and video recording, the rule allows only one stationary, mechanically silent video camera for broadcast television, a second mechanically silent video camera for other media, and one silent still camera for print media to be used in the courtroom at any one time.
- Motions to suppress may be electronically recorded.
- If news media ask to record multiple cases in a session on the same day, a judge may reasonably restrict the number of cases that are recorded to prevent undue administrative burdens on the court.
- The rule applies to clerk magistrates conducting public proceedings.

Media Registration Process

- Instructions, registration forms and information for the news media will be online at www.mass.gov/courts/sjc/media/media-reg-rule119.html
- Once the registration form is completed, the Supreme Judicial Court's Public Information Office will send an acknowledgment form by email to the registrant.
- The Public Information Office will maintain a list of registrants on the media registration page of the Supreme Judicial Court's website.

Courthouse Protocol

- The acknowledgment form must be shown by the news media to court security when going to court. A photo identification card, such as a driver's license, is

required. Identification showing affiliation with a registered news organization, such as a business card, may also be required. The acknowledgment form can be downloaded and stored on a mobile device to be shown to court security. A paper copy also is acceptable.

- The news media representative must first show the acknowledgment form and photo identification to an associate court officer at the courthouse entrance. All electronic devices will be screened at the entrance.
- The news media representative needs to obtain permission from the judge before using electronic devices in the courtroom. Photos and audio or video recording are not allowed without specific, prior approval by a judge.
- The news media representative should contact the clerk's office to obtain permission from the judge before the court session begins. A judge may require reasonable advance notice, in accordance with the rule.
- The news media representative must also show the acknowledgment form and photo identification to a court officer assigned to the court proceeding. A court officer may make a copy of the form or record the names and contact information.

Contact for questions or assistance

Joan Kenney or Erika Gully-Santiago
Public Information Office
Supreme Judicial Court
John Adams Courthouse
One Pemberton Square
Boston, MA 02108

Tel: 617-557-1114
557-1113
557-1115

joan.kenney@sjc.state.ma.us

erika.gullysantiago@sjc.state.ma.us