

SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT

SUFFOLK, SS.

ORDER RE: ELECTRONIC FILING PILOT PROJECTS

To advance efficiency in the Massachusetts courts and thereby better serve the public and the bar, the Justices hereby authorize the trial and appellate courts to conduct pilot projects on electronic filing and electronic service of court documents. The attached Interim Massachusetts Electronic Filing Rules that will govern the pilot projects are also approved. Therefore,

IT IS ORDERED THAT:

1. Electronic filing pilot projects are hereby authorized for the trial and appellate courts. Trial court pilot courts shall be approved by the Chief Justice of the Trial Court and the Court Administrator. The Justices of the appellate courts shall approve the pilot projects in those courts.
2. The attached Interim Massachusetts Electronic Filing Rules are approved for use in the pilot projects. These rules shall remain in effect throughout the pilot projects, unless otherwise ordered by this Court. The rules may be amended by order of this Court.
3. If there is any conflict between the Interim Massachusetts Electronic Filing Rules and the Massachusetts Rules of Appellate Procedure, the Massachusetts Rules of Civil Procedure, or the rules of any appellate court or trial court department, the terms of the Interim Massachusetts Electronic Filing Rules shall govern the pilot projects.
4. Each pilot court shall issue an order describing the scope of its pilot project and any additional requirements that are not set forth in the Interim Massachusetts Electronic Filing Rules.

5. The pilot projects shall begin in March, 2015, or as soon after as practicable and shall continue until further order of the Court.

present,

<u>RALPH D. GANTS</u>)	Chief Justice
)	
<u>FRANCIS X. SPINA</u>)	
)	
<u>ROBERT J. CORDY</u>)	Justices
)	
<u>MARGOT BOTSFORD</u>)	
)	
<u>FERNANDE R.V. DUFFLY</u>)	
)	
<u>BARBARA A. LENK</u>)	
)	
<u>GERALDINE S. HINES</u>)	

Date: February 25, 2015

INTERIM ELECTRONIC FILING RULES FOR PILOT COURTS

Rule 1. Scope of Rules

- (a) **Authority for Pilot Projects.** The Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) has authorized the appellate and trial courts (Pilot Courts) to conduct Electronic Filing Pilot Projects (Pilot Projects) with the Electronic Filing Service Provider (Provider). The scope of each Pilot Project is described by separate order issued by each Pilot Court.
- (b) **Interim Electronic Filing Rules.** These Interim Electronic Filing Rules for Pilot Courts (E-Filing Rules) shall govern procedures in the Pilot Projects. To the extent that any Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders are inconsistent with these rules, the E-Filing Rules shall govern the Pilot Projects.
- (c) **Court Record.** The official court record in a Pilot Project case shall be the Electronic Case File (ECF) pertaining to that case, together with any documents and exhibits filed under the conventional method.
- (d) **Use of These Interim Rules.** All filers shall become familiar with these E-Filing Rules and all training and documentation materials provided for use by the Provider.

Rule 2. Definitions

"Clerk" shall refer to the Clerk, Clerk Magistrate, or Register of Probate of any Pilot Court, as well as their respective assistants or deputies.

"Conventional method" shall refer to court rules and procedures that would apply in the absence of an E-filing Pilot Project. Parties or counsel who are ordered or opt to proceed "conventionally," as provided in these E-Filing Rules, must look to the appropriate Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders for guidance.

"ECF" shall refer to the electronic case file maintained on the Pilot Court's case management and document management systems.

"Electronic filing," "e-filing," or "electronically filed" shall refer to the submission of documents through the e-filing system for purposes of filing in a Pilot Project case. E-mailing or sending a document by facsimile does not constitute "e-filing" a document.

"Electronic filing system" or "e-filing system" shall refer to the Provider's system of electronic filing and electronic service of documents via the internet.

"Electronic service" or "e-service" shall refer to the electronic transmission of a notice of filing to the electronic mail (e-mail) address of a party who has consented to electronic service through the Provider. The notice will contain a hyperlink to access the document that was filed electronically for the purpose of accomplishing service. E-service according to these E-Filing Rules shall be deemed in compliance with the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders that govern

service and notice. Service of process or summons to gain jurisdiction over persons or property may not be made by e-service.

"Electronic signature" or "electronically signed" shall mean a signature from a User, Judge, or Clerk, that complies with the requirements set forth in Rule 12, below.

"Envelope" shall refer to a submission containing one or more filings to be filed on a single case by a filing User.

"Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders" shall mean the Rules of Civil, Criminal, and Appellate Procedure, the Rules of the Supreme Judicial Court, Appeals Court and Trial Court, the Rules of the various Trial Court Departments, and the Rules Governing Time Standards and Case Management, together with all Standing Orders.

"Non-Registered Participant" shall mean a party to a Pilot Project case who has not registered with the Provider.

"PDF" (Portable Document Format) shall refer to the file format compatible with the latest version of Adobe Reader. There are two types of PDFs: electronically converted PDFs and scanned PDFs.

Electronically converted PDFs are created from word processing documents (MS Word, WordPerfect, etc.) using Adobe Acrobat or similar software. They are text searchable, accessible, and their file size is small. Electronically converted PDFs are preferred.

Scanned PDFs are created from paper documents run through an optical scanner. Scanned PDFs have a larger file size and lower quality image and should be avoided when possible.

"Provider" shall refer to the Electronic Filing Service Provider designated by the courts.

"Provider Notification" shall mean a provider-generated notice acknowledging activity within the e-filing system.

"Public access terminal" shall mean a publicly accessible computer provided by Pilot Courts for the purposes of allowing e-filing and viewing public electronic court records. The public access terminal shall be located at the courthouse and will be available during normal business hours.

"Service Contact" shall mean an individual to be served electronically by the electronic filing system.

"User" shall refer to a participant in a Pilot Project case who has properly registered with the e-filing system. An "Independent User" shall refer to a user who is not affiliated with a law firm.

"User ID" shall refer to the e-mail address provided during registration that is used to login to the e-filing system.

"Waiver Account" shall refer to a method of payment whereby court and provider fees may be waived. The acceptance of any document filed under a waiver account shall be subject to the court's determination that use of the account is appropriate, given the nature of the filing.

Rule 3. Eligibility and Conditions of Registration

(a) **Eligibility.** Participation in the Pilot Project shall be determined by Standing Order of the Pilot Court. In general, registration for the Pilot Project shall include:

1. Attorneys who are members of the Massachusetts Bar.
2. Attorneys who are admitted to practice in a Massachusetts court pro hac vice.
3. Self-represented parties.
4. Any non-party who is seeking or has obtained permission of the court to participate in the case (e.g., a witness seeking a protective order, interveners, amicus curiae or court investigator).

(b) **Registration.** Registration is accomplished by completing the online e-filing system registration, a link to which is available on each Pilot Court's website. An e-mail address will be required for registration. Users shall furnish their primary business e-mail address for registration. A User may register as a member of a law firm or as an Independent User. An attorney who is acting as a self-represented litigant shall register as an Independent User with a unique e-mail address.

(c) **Law Firm or Agency Registration.** The Provider shall allow a firm or agency administrator(s) to register a central account profile on behalf of a firm or agency's multiple Users. Once an administrator has completed this central registration, the administrator(s) can add additional Users to that account.

(d) **Conditions of Registration.** By registering, the User acknowledges that:

1. Registration shall constitute consent to receipt of Provider notifications, electronic court notifications, and e-service of all e-filed documents.
2. It is the User's responsibility to ensure that the court and the Provider have the correct e-mail address(es) at all times. Users shall update the Provider within 7 days of any change in the information provided at registration.

(e) **User ID.** The e-mail address provided during registration will serve as a unique User ID.

(f) **Multiple User Accounts.** A User may set up multiple accounts using multiple e-mail addresses. It is the User's obligation to monitor each account and upload filings correctly.

(g) **User Password.** At registration the User must designate a unique password in accordance with the specifications given by the Provider. Users may reset their password for the e-filing system at any time.

(h) **Confidentiality of User ID and Password.** The User ID and password is confidential and shall be used only by the User and any other person that the User authorizes. Use of a User ID shall be deemed authorized by the User. Users should contact the Pilot Court if they believe a filing was submitted falsely under their name.

Rule 4. Electronic Filing Procedures

(a) **E-filing Through the Provider.** E-filing shall be through the Provider's e-filing system only. The Provider shall receive electronic filings 24 hours per day except when undergoing maintenance or repair.

(b) **Receipt of Provider Notifications.** Whenever a User submits a document to the court through the e-filing system, a Provider Notification will automatically generate and transmit to the User, acknowledging the submission. Provider notifications shall also be sent at the time the court accepts or rejects any submitted document.

(c) **Date of Filing Shall Be Determined By Court Hours.** A document will be considered filed if it is submitted through the e-filing system before the close of regular business hours on the day it is submitted unless it is rejected by the court. See Rule 4(d). A document submitted after 4:30 p.m. or on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday shall be considered filed the next business day, unless it is rejected by the court.

(d) **Clerk's Review of Electronically Filed Documents.** Prior to entry upon the docket, the Clerk shall review each document submitted through the e-filing system for compliance with the E-filing Rules, Pilot Scope, and the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders. Upon the court's acceptance, the document shall be considered "filed" with the court at the time the original submission to the e-filing system was complete, as stated on the Provider Notification transmitted pursuant to Rule 4(b), subject to Rule 4(c), and a Provider Notification of the acceptance will be transmitted. If a filing is rejected, the filing User will receive notice from the Provider which shall note the rejection and the court's reason(s) therefore.

(e) **Correction of Errors.** Upon the discovery of any error made during the e-filing process, the User may cancel the transaction if the cancel option is available in the e-filing system. The cancel option is not available once the court begins the review process. After this period, the User should abide by the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders for correcting filings containing errors.

(f) **Electronically Filed Documents Shall Be Conventionally Titled.** All documents filed electronically shall be titled in the same manner they are titled when filed conventionally.

(g) **Exchange of Discovery and Other Materials.** The e-filing system may be used for the electronic exchange of discovery materials and other communications between the parties that are not intended to be filed with the court. Use of the e-filing system for these purposes should be decided by the parties.

Rule 5. Rejection of Electronic Documents for Technical Nonconformance

Rejection for Nonconformance. The Clerk may reject any document filed electronically for any technical nonconformance and may identify the error to be corrected and may state a deadline for the party to resubmit the document in a conforming format. This rule shall not, however, extend the mandatory or statutory time, including any statute of limitations, for the filing of such document.

Rule 6. Electronic Filing and Service of Civil Case Initiating Documents

(a) **Filing of Case Initiating Documents Permitted on a Pilot Project Basis.** Where permitted by the Pilot Project, case initiating documents, such as a complaint or petition, may be submitted for filing through the e-filing system, accompanied by electronic payment of the required filing fee. Motions to waive fees may be submitted through the e-filing system in accordance with Rule 8(d).

(b) **Court Action Upon Acceptance of Case Initiating Document.** Upon acceptance of a case initiating document for filing, a case number will be assigned and the document will be processed. If the case initiating document is rejected, the User will be informed as provided in Rule 4(d).

(c) **Service of Case Initiating Documents Shall Be By Conventional Methods.** Unless otherwise determined by the Pilot Court, or unless the responding party has consented in writing to accept electronic service or service by some other method, case initiating documents shall be served by conventional methods, together with a notice to the responding party stating that the case has been electronically commenced.

Rule 7. Service of Electronically Filed Documents

(a) **All Documents Filed Must Be Served.** Except as otherwise provided in the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders, or as otherwise ordered by the Pilot Court, all electronically filed documents must be served on all other parties. Any document filed through the e-filing system must include a Certificate of Service. Subject to the Pilot Court standing order, the Certificate of Service may appear as a part of the document being filed or may be filed as a separate document.

(b) **Electronic Service Accomplished Through the Electronic Filing Service Provider; Conventional Service Required for Non-Registered Participants.** All Users in a case may be served electronically through the e-filing system. The User submitting the document for filing through the e-filing system is responsible for serving a paper copy of the document by regular mail or hand delivery to all parties who are Non-Registered Participants, in accordance with the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders. The filing User must include with the Certificate of Service submitted electronically a list of the names of all parties requiring service that will be served electronically by the e-filing system, and a list of the names and addresses of all parties requiring conventional service.

Example:

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that on (date) I filed the attached document(s) through the Electronic Filing Service Provider (Provider) for electronic service to the following registered Users: (list of names). I hereby certify that on (date), copies to non-registered users were sent by conventional mailing in accordance with the rules: (list of names and addresses).

/s/ John A. Smith

(c) Conventional Service Required If Electronic Service Notification Is Undeliverable. If an electronic service notice transmitted to a User's e-mail account is rejected or returned as undeliverable, the Provider will generate notice to the filing User who submitted the document. If a filing User receives notice that electronic service on any party was undeliverable, the filing User shall then serve the document on that User by conventional methods. The filing User shall submit an additional Certificate of Service to the ECF to reflect that conventional service has occurred.

(d) Electronic Notification Shall Signal Completion of Electronic Service; Calculating Time To Respond. Electronic service shall be deemed complete at the time of transmission to the e-mail account of the Service Contact. For the purpose of computing time to respond to documents received by electronic service, any document served on a day or at a time when the court is not open for business shall be deemed served at the time of the next opening of the court for business. Whenever a User has the right or is required to do some act within a prescribed period after the completion of electronic service of a notice or other documents upon him/her and the notice or document is served upon him/her by electronic means, three days shall be added to the prescribed period.

Rule 8. Payment of Fees

(a) Provider May Charge Fee for Civil Filings. The e-filing Provider may charge a fee for its services, on civil filings only. The Provider will provide for one or more methods of electronic payment.

(b) Payments Shall Be Made at Time of Filing. All applicable fees for e-filing are due and payable at the time of e-filing unless waived by permission of the court. Failure to timely pay a required fee may cause the document submitted to be refused by the Clerk under Rule 4(d) or stricken by the court. The payment will be debited when the Clerk accepts the document.

(c) Payments Shall Be Transmitted Through the E-Filing System. Users shall make any payment due to the Clerk through the e-filing system unless otherwise ordered by the court.

(d) Request to Waive Court Fees. Users may submit a motion for waiver of court filing fees accompanied by a separate affidavit of indigency through the e-filing system. These forms

are available on the Massachusetts court system website. The affidavit of indigency shall be impounded. See Rule 11(b). However, a motion for waiver of court filing fees should not be impounded. If the court allows a fee waiver there will be no Provider fee.

Rule 9. Format and Content of Documents

(a) **Documents Shall Be Filed In Searchable PDF.** Except where specifically provided, all documents submitted for e-filing must be in searchable Portable Document Format (PDF). Documents should be submitted as electronically converted PDFs rather than scanned PDFs whenever possible. Scanned PDFs should be made searchable using optical-character-recognition software, such as Adobe Acrobat. Documents shall not be locked or otherwise password protected.

(b) **Documents Shall be Formatted in Compliance with Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders.** Users shall format all documents in accordance with the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders governing formatting of paper documents, including page limits and font style and size, unless a deviation has been allowed by court order.

(c) **Internal Links Are Allowed.** Each document submitted for e-filing may contain electronic links, but only to navigate within the same document.

(d) **Paper Filing Required.** The following documents shall be filed by conventional methods in paper form only, unless otherwise ordered by a Pilot Court:

- i. Impounded documents, except where specifically provided. See Rules 8(d) and 11.
- ii. Original pretrial hearing and trial exhibits.
- iii. Medical records.

Rule 10. File Size Limitations and Legibility

(a) **File Size Limitations.** The Provider has set a maximum file size of 25 MB, and a maximum envelope size of 35 MB. A User must limit the size of each electronically filed document, and the total size of all the documents filed within one envelope, to comply with the maximum file size and envelope size permitted by the Provider. Documents exceeding those limits cannot be transmitted by the Provider.

(b) **Submission of Oversized Documents.** Documents or envelopes larger than the maximum allowed file size may be submitted for e-filing if they are broken up into separate segments, each of which complies with the Provider's size restrictions. The User shall indicate in the "Filing Description" field that a filing is part of multiple parts (for example, "Part 1 of 2"). The additional envelopes necessary to submit multiple parts may be filed under a waiver account, subject to review by the Pilot Court.

- (c) **Scan Settings.** To minimize file size, Users must configure their scanners to scan documents at 200 dpi and in black and white rather than in color. Documents appearing in color in their original form, such as color photographs, should be scanned in color.
- (d) **Users Must Verify Document Legibility and Orientation.** A User must verify the legibility and orientation of scanned documents before submitting them for e-filing.

Rule 11. Filing of Impounded Information

- (a) **Filing of Impounded Documents.** Except as otherwise provided, impounded documents should be filed in hard copy with the Clerk's office. Such documents must be clearly labeled as impounded, with the appropriate accompanying notice of impoundment or motion to impound pursuant to the Uniform Rules of Impoundment Procedure, and any other applicable Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders.
- (b) **Electronic Filing of Impounded Documents.** When permitted by a Pilot Court impounded documents may be e-filed through the e-filing system. The User shall identify the document as impounded at the time of filing.
- (c) **Identification of Impounded Documents By User.** Where an impounded document is submitted through the e-filing system, the User shall mark the cover or first page of the document as impounded.
- (d) **Motions to Impound.** A User may submit for e-filing a motion to file an impounded document. If the motion is granted, the User shall then submit by conventional methods the impounded document to the Clerk's office for filing. A paper copy of the order granting the motion must be attached to documents so filed and delivered to the Clerk.
- (e) **Confidentiality.** The confidentiality of an electronic record or an electronic or paper copy thereof is equivalent to that of a paper record. Where an impounded document is scanned or otherwise placed in the e-filing system, access may be permitted only to the extent provided by law.

Rule 12. Protection of Personal Identifying Data

Unless otherwise ordered by the court, all Users shall comply with the Supreme Judicial Court's Interim Guidelines for the Protection of Personal Identifying Data in Publicly Accessible Court Documents. See <http://www.mass.gov/courts>

Pursuant to these guidelines, it shall not be the responsibility of the Clerk's office to determine if filings are compliant.

Rule 13. Electronic Signature

(a) **Attorneys.** An attorney's use of the e-filing system to file documents shall serve as the attorney's signature for purposes of Mass.R.Civ.P. 11 and for all other purposes under the Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders. In addition, all documents submitted for e-filing must include either a scan of the individual's handwritten signature, an electronically inserted image intended to substitute for a signature, or a "/s/ name of signatory" block, which shall have the same validity and effect as a handwritten signature, and must set forth the attorney's name, Board of Bar Overseers number, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.

When using the "s" option, the name of the User must be preceded by an "/s/" and typed in the space where the signature would otherwise appear. For example:

/s/ John A. Smith
John A. Smith
BBO#123456
123 Main Street
Boston, MA 02210
617-123-4567
jasmith@internetprovider.com

(b) **Self-Represented Litigants.** All documents submitted for e-filing must include either a scan of the individual's handwritten signature, an electronically inserted image intended to substitute for a signature, or a "/s/ name of signatory" block, which shall have the same validity and effect as a handwritten signature, and must set forth the individual's name, address, telephone number and e-mail address. When using the "s" option, the "/s/" must be typed in the space where the signature would otherwise appear. For example:

/s/ John B. Doe
John B. Doe
123 Main Street
Boston, MA 02210
617-123-4567
johnbdoe@isp.com

(c) **Multiple Signatories.** A User who submits a document for e-filing that bears more than one signature (e.g., stipulations, joint motions, joint status reports, etc.) must ensure that all signatures comply with Rule 13(a).

(d) **Signature of Notary; Retention of Original.** Notarized documents containing a handwritten signature and physical seal may be submitted for e-filing. The User shall submit a scanned copy of the notarized document through the e-filing system, and the court shall maintain the scanned document as the official court record. The court may require the User to produce the original paper document. The User shall retain the original for future production, if necessary, until two years after the conclusion of the case, including any appeal.

(e) **Summons and Complaint.** A summons and complaint, petition, or other case initiating document that is signed in compliance with this Rule bears a sufficient signature under any

applicable Massachusetts Court Rules and Orders.

Rule 14. Orders and Judgments

- (a) Orders and Judgments May Be Electronically Signed.** The assigned Judge or Clerk may electronically sign all orders, judgments, and notifications.
- (b) Electronic Signatures Shall Have the Force of Conventional Signatures.** Any order signed electronically has the same force and effect as if the Judge had affixed his/her signature to a paper copy of the order and it had been entered on the docket in the conventional method.
- (c) Clerk May Enter Orders By Text-Only Entry.** A Clerk may enter orders, issued by a Judge or Clerk as the case may be, by a text-only entry upon the docket. The text-only entry shall constitute the court's only order on the matter.
- (d) Notification.** All Users and Non-Registered Participants of record in the case will receive notification either electronically or by conventional methods.

Rule 15. Technical Failures and Timeliness of Filing

- (a) Technical Failure of the Provider May Excuse Untimely Filing.** A User whose filing is made untimely as a result of a technical failure of the Provider may seek appropriate relief from the court. The court may enter an order permitting the document to be deemed filed or served as of the date it was first attempted to be transmitted electronically. If appropriate, the court may adjust the schedule for responding to these documents or for the court's hearing, or provide other relief.
- (b) Scheduled Maintenance Will Not Excuse Untimely Filing.** Notice of known system outages or maintenance will be posted by the Provider in advance on the User login screen. The notice will be posted as soon as the scheduled date and time is confirmed. Users will also receive e-mail notification of the upcoming downtime. Scheduled maintenance will not constitute a technical failure under these E-Filing Rules nor excuse an untimely filing.
- (c) User Error Will Not Excuse Untimely Filing.** Problems on the User's end, e.g., problems with the User's Internet Service Provider (ISP), hardware, or software problems, will not constitute a technical failure under these E-Filing Rules nor excuse an untimely filing.