POLICY FOR EXTENDED MEDIA COVERAGE IN THE CIRCUIT COURTS OF ILLINOIS

(Effective January 1, 2026)

1.0 Media Access

Public access to court proceedings is allowed by the United States and State of Illinois Constitutions and integral in ensuring the trust, confidence, and transparency of our judicial system. In keeping with this spirit and under the authority granted by the Illinois Supreme Court in M.R. No. 2634, all Illinois judicial circuit courts shall allow requests for extended media coverage of public court proceedings in accordance with the provisions of this policy. The coverage shall always be subject to the discretion of the judge presiding over the proceeding.

Extended media coverage shall not disrupt, distract, or interfere with the solemnity, decorum, and dignity of the court. Nothing in this policy shall limit or restrict the power, authority, or responsibility otherwise vested in the judge presiding over the proceeding to: (a) control the conduct of any proceeding; (b) maintain decorum and prevent distractions; (c) guarantee the safety of the courtroom, including any party, witness, or juror; and (d) ensure the fair and impartial administration of justice.

2.0 Definitions

(a) "Extended media coverage" means any news media recording or broadcasting of court proceedings for the purpose of gathering and disseminating to the public.

(b) "News media" means a newspaper or other periodical issued at regular intervals whether in print or electronic format, a news service whether in print or electronic format, a radio station, a television station, a television network, a community antenna television service, or a person or corporation that, in a professional capacity, produces news content aimed at informing the public. In determining whether a requestor fits the definition of news media, these factors should be considered:

- A requestor’s membership in a news/media trade or industry organization;
- A requestor’s personal connection to the proceeding;
- A requestor’s editorial process, which should promote accountability and adherence to extended media coverage policies, rules, and content-sharing (pooling) obligations; and

- How the requestor, if granted access, would impact a party's right to a fair trial.

(c) "Judge" means the circuit or associate judge presiding over the proceeding.

(d) "Chief judge" means the chief judge of the circuit.

(e) "Court proceeding(s)" include all public trials, hearings, or other proceedings conducted in the circuit court whether in person or by videoconference.

(f) "Court media liaison" means a person who works for the court system and helps facilitate extended media coverage requests.

(g) "Media requestor" means someone who has submitted an extended media coverage request and meets the definition of news media as defined in Section 2(b) of this policy.

(h) "Media coordinator" means a media requestor or other member of the news media designated by the judge or chief judge to help coordinate extended media coverage by news media who have been granted a request for extended media coverage. The media coordinator shall ensure the extended media coverage policy and other local rules and policies are followed by all news media. The media coordinator is responsible for content sharing (pooling) obligations.

(i) "Portable electronic devices" are mobile devices capable of electronically storing, accessing, or transmitting information, such as personal computers, tablet computers, mobile telephones (including cellphones and any form of telephone with cameras and audio and video recording and transmission capabilities), electronic calendars, e-book readers, smartwatches, and similar devices.

3.0 General

Extended media coverage of court proceedings may be permitted in the courtroom during sessions of the court, under the following conditions:

(a) Permission first shall have been granted by the judge, who may prescribe such conditions of coverage as provided for in this policy.

(b) Absent good cause shown, extended media coverage is prohibited in the following case types: juvenile, probate, guardianship, dissolution of marriage, family law, parentage, adoption, mental health, evidence suppression, orders of protection, and trade secrets.

(c) Extended media coverage of jury selection and jurors is prohibited.

(d) Equipment authorized by these provisions shall not be operated during a court recess or during "off the record" conversations meant to be private, such as sidebars.

(e) The quantity and types of equipment permitted in the courtroom are subject to the judge's discretion within the parameters set forth in Section 5 of this policy.

(f) The judge may deny, limit, amend, or terminate extended media coverage at any time during the proceedings if this policy, other local policies and rules, or additional conditions imposed by the judge have been violated, or if the judge finds that extended media coverage poses a danger to the safety of the courtroom or court participants, or if the right to a fair trial will be affected.

(g) A decision by a judge to deny, limit, amend, or terminate extended media coverage is not appealable.

(h) A judge may authorize extended media coverage of ceremonial proceedings at variance with provisions in this policy as the judge sees fit.

(i) There shall be no filing fees associated with filing a request for extended media coverage or an objection to extended media coverage.

(j) News media shall not conduct audio or video interviews within the courtroom. Interviews may be conducted only within designated news media areas, within personal offices of the interviewee, or outside the courthouse, in accordance with local rules and policies.

4.0 Procedural

(a) Requestor. Only news media may submit requests for extended media coverage.

Sample Request for EMC attached as Appendix A.

(b) Requests. All requests for extended media coverage shall be filed with the circuit clerk as soon as practicable, but not less than 7 days in advance of the time the proceeding sought to be covered is scheduled to begin. Requests may be made on shorter notice as the court may prescribe or when a proceeding is not scheduled at least 7 days in advance (for example, an initial appearance in a criminal proceeding or a temporary restraining order in a civil proceeding).

(c) Notice of Request. At the same time as the request is filed, the media requestor shall provide notice of the request to the court media liaison, all counsel of record, and parties appearing without counsel.

(d) Objections.

(i) Party Objections.

Any party that objects to extended media coverage should file a written objection, stating the reasons, within 3 days of receiving notice of the request. Objections may be made outside the 3-day window as the court prescribes. The court may also allow oral objections.

Sample Party Objection attached as Appendix B.

(ii) Witness Objections.

Any counsel or self-represented party, who seeks to introduce the testimony of a witness, shall notify the witness of the request for, or the granting of, extended media coverage. Witnesses may file a written objection or make an oral objection to extended media coverage prior to testifying and as soon as practicable. Objections made by a testifying victim in a sexual abuse case or any other forcible felony prosecution, and by police informants, undercover agents, and relocated witnesses, will not be denied absent good cause shown.

Sample Witness Objection attached as Appendix C.

(e) Notice of Objections. At the same time a written objection is filed, the objector shall provide notice of the objection to the requestor, the court media liaison, all counsel of record, and parties appearing without counsel.

(f) Discretion of the Judge. All party objections shall be heard and decided by the judge prior to the commencement of the proceedings. The judge may rule based on the filed papers alone or may consider affidavits, evidence by proffer or testimony, and oral argument in deciding whether to allow extended media coverage, in whole or in part. The judge maintains broad discretion in deciding all matters related to extended media coverage.

Sample Order attached as Appendix D.

5.0 Technical

(a) Equipment specifications. All equipment used by media personnel in the courtroom during court proceedings must operate quietly and without drawing attention, so as not to disrupt or distract from the proceedings. Media personnel may be required to demonstrate compliance with these requirements. Failure to do so may result in the exclusion of the equipment from the courtroom.

(b) Audio equipment. Microphones, wiring, and audio recording equipment shall be of adequate technical quality to prevent interference with courtroom amplification systems or electronic recording systems. Microphones for use of counsel and judges shall be equipped with power switches.

(c) Lighting. No auxiliary lighting of any kind shall be used in the courtroom. Nor shall any light or other display be detectable to participants to indicate when any equipment is in operation.

(d) Pooling. News media are encouraged to pool equipment and personnel in all proceedings and must do so, when necessary, due to space limitations in the courtroom or limits on equipment, as set forth below. It is the media coordinator's responsibility to set up pooling arrangements that follow the judge's order for the proceeding.

1. Photography. No more than two news media representatives may take photos during a court proceeding.

2. Audiovisual recording. No more than two news media representatives may perform video recording during a court proceeding.

3. Digital media. Any number of media representatives may be designated to perform online journalism (live-tweeting, blogging, posting case developments) during a court proceeding.

4. Sound recording. No more than one audio system, with designated personnel to operate it, shall be permitted.

5. Livestreaming. No more than one livestream of court proceedings, with designated personnel to operate it, shall be permitted.

6. Use of electronic devices for other activities. In accordance with the Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Electronic Devices, any number of media

representatives may be designated to use portable electronic devices during a court proceeding for notetaking or other activities.

(e) Location of equipment and personnel. Equipment and operating personnel shall be in, and coverage of the proceedings shall take place from, an area(s) within the courtroom designated by the judge, court media liaison, or other authorized court personnel. The area(s) designated shall provide reasonable access to the proceedings to be covered. Whenever practicable, sound recording equipment and its operating personnel should be located outside the courtroom. Equipment shall not be stored in the courthouse without permission.

(f) Equipment setup and operation. The judge, court media liaison, or other authorized court personnel may issue specific instructions and timeframes regarding equipment setup and installation. Equipment shall be operated from a fixed position. News media shall not move about the courtroom while proceedings are in session, nor shall they engage in any movement attracting undue attention.

6.0 Jury Admonishment and Instruction

(a) Jury Admonishment. The judge shall give the following admonishment to the jury at the commencement of any criminal or civil trial with an approved request for extended media coverage:

> In this case, I have approved a request to allow the news media to [video] [record] [photograph] [livestream] [blog] the proceedings. This is permitted by the Illinois Supreme Court and is subject to numerous restrictions contained in the Policy for Extended Media Coverage in the Circuit Courts of Illinois.
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> The policy regarding cameras in the courtroom is very strict and the court closely monitors every policy provision. In general, the policy permits the news media to film, record, and photograph the courtroom setting, the participants in the trial, and any persons who might be in the audience. The policy does not permit the news media to film or photograph any of you as jurors or the jury panel in the courtroom or outside the courtroom.
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> The presence of cameras does not make this case more important than any other. All trials are equally important to the court and the involved parties. You should not draw any inferences or conclusions from the fact that cameras are present at this particular trial.

The news media is generally able to choose which portion or portion(s) of the trial they wish to attend. Therefore, their attendance may be periodic from day to day. Also, the news media may not film or photograph certain witnesses. You are not to concern yourself with why certain witnesses are filmed or photographed and others are not.

Whether a particular witness is filmed or photographed is not any indication as to the value of, or weight to be given to, that witness's testimony.

You should ignore the presence of any cameras. If you find at any time that you are distracted or unable to concentrate because of the cameras, please notify me immediately.

(b) Jury Instruction. The judge shall give the following instruction to the jury when news media is present at any portion of a criminal or civil trial:

In this case, the news media was permitted to [video] [record] [photograph] [livestream] [blog] the proceedings pursuant to the Illinois Supreme Court Policy for Extended Media Coverage in the Circuit Courts of Illinois.

In your deliberations, you should not draw any inferences or conclusions from the fact there was extended media coverage at this trial or proceeding. Nor should you concern yourself with why certain witnesses were filmed or photographed and others were not. Whether a particular witness was filmed or photographed is not any indication as to the value of, or weight to be given to, that witness's testimony.