



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local Court Rules Accessible to Internet Users Through Pennsylvania's Judiciary Web Site

HARRISBURG, June 1, 1999 — Pennsylvania's Judiciary Web Site is providing a growing number of computer users statewide with the ability to review local rules that govern the practice of law in county criminal, civil, orphan and domestic relations courts.

Local court guidelines and administrative procedures for 58 of Pennsylvania's 60 judicial districts are now published at: <http://www.courts.state.pa.us>. Huntingdon and Wayne counties have no local rules.

The rules cover an extensive array of local policies and procedures including: filing of legal papers, forms of briefs, grounds for continuing a case, service of legal papers, hearing procedures, oral arguments, pretrial conferences and petitions.

"My Supreme Court colleagues and I strongly believe that making local rules accessible to anyone who has Internet access is another significant step in the use of technology to improve Pennsylvania's justice system," Supreme Court Justice Sandra Schultz Newman said. "For legal practitioners and citizens with Internet access in their office and homes, electronic access to local rules is a significant benefit. Most other Pennsylvanians can access the Internet through their local libraries."

Justice Newman chairs the Statewide Rules Committee of the Judicial Council of Pennsylvania, which began to oversee the posting of the rules electronically one year ago this month as part of a larger project that involves evaluating local rules' potential impact on Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System. The Judicial Council, which has members from all three state government branches and citizens-at-large, is an advisory panel of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

The goal of the overall project is to evaluate the differences among local rules and determine how best to unify the practice of law in the state. Posting local rules online enables court users to find information quicker and easier than traveling to the county courthouse for desired material. Rules for each county generally cover hundreds of pages.

(More)

Since going online on January 1, 1999, local court rules have fast become one of the most popular areas on Pennsylvania's Judiciary Web Site. Bucks County rules, for example, were the most downloaded data file for the site in March.

To locate the local rules electronically, access the Judiciary Home Page at <http://www.courts.state.pa.us>, then:

- Scroll down to the "Supreme Court Committees" listing.
- Click on the highlighted "Local-Rules project" line under the Judicial Council heading.

With a redesigned Judiciary Web Site that is expected to be online within the next six months, finding the rules should become even more easy, with a "two click" effort. Local rules will be a separate listing under the Supreme Court Committees, Common Pleas Courts and Special Courts headings.

Additionally, a search function that allows users to find *major* topics — such as Local Court Rules — also will be available under the new Judiciary Web Site redesign.

The electronic availability of local court rules is another example of how Pennsylvania's Judiciary has been among the nation's leaders in using automation to efficiently administer its state court system and broaden public accessibility. Pennsylvania was one of the earliest states to establish an automated system for minor courts, and is developing an integrated docketing network for statewide appellate courts. Pennsylvania became the second state court system to operate a web site in April 1995 — just one week after Florida's court system launched a site — providing public access to a host of data including appellate court opinions.

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