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Court's Corner: e-Court for Everyone

By: Kristen Senz

Two systems, two vendors, two filing tracks

After months of negotiations, the New Hampshire Judicial Branch in late November signed contracts with two software companies that will design the statewide electronic court filing system known as the NH e-Court Project.

E-Court will begin with small-claims cases filed in Concord and Plymouth; this pilot project is expected to start in March or April 2014 as the vendors work out technical issues with the software interface that judges will use on the bench. Other Circuit Court civil cases, including landlord-tenant matters, will then be added before the electronic rollout of superior court civil cases, which is slated for next September.

Tyler Technologies of Plano, Tex., was selected to supply the computer software package that will allow attorneys, parties to cases, and members of the public to file and retrieve court documents electronically. Intresys of San Mateo, Calif., will supply the step-by-step e-filing software specifically designed for use by the growing number of pro se litigants, who are involved in nearly three-quarters of trial court cases and more than 95 percent of small claims cases. The contracts are each for \$1.2 million to 1.5 million depending on optional functionality accepted by the NHJB during the course of the project. The 20 percent cost for maintenance is in addition to these implementation costs starting in year two, and the 20 percent is only applied to a portion of those implementation costs.

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"These vendors were selected from a very competitive field. We look forward to configuring a state-of-the-art, secure, end-to-end electronic information system for our courts that greatly reduces costly paper handling while improving services for citizens who use the court," said Peter Croteau, the court system's chief technology officer.

Since 2004, Tyler has maintained the case management system known as Odyssey, which is used throughout the New Hampshire Trial Court system. The contract for e-filing software was awarded to Tyler after a competitive bidding process involving five software vendors and review of proposals by a seven-member committee. Tyler is currently processing more than 200,000 e-filing cases in 10 states, including Oregon, Minnesota, Maryland and Texas.

"The ease with which we will be able to integrate Odyssey components with Tyler's e-filing system was the most efficient, and cost effective route for us to take in launching the NH e-Court project," Croteau said.

For the past two years, NH e-Court Project team managers have worked with industry experts to redesign traditional business practices within the court system in preparation for establishing a new, streamlined electronic filing system. That redesign, applied to the vendors' e-filing systems, will ultimately eliminate the court's paper-bound filing systems around the state, improving workflow and freeing up scarce building space that has long been reserved for storage of court files.

"We are grateful for the ongoing hard work of our project team and for the support of state lawmakers who recognized the need to update and modernize the administration of justice in our state," NH Supreme Court Chief Justice Linda Stewart Dalianis said.

Lawmakers this year included \$3.2 million for the NH e-Court Project in the FY14-15 capital budget for the Judicial Branch; \$1.9 million was appropriated in FY12-13. To date, \$5.1 million has been allocated of the \$7.25 million cost expected for the entire system.