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Bar News - June 15, 2016

**Court News: NH e-Court Project Update: Estates to Move Online**

By: Gina Belmont

In the two years since e-filing first launched for small claims cases at Circuit Court locations in Concord and Plymouth, e-filing has rolled out to every Circuit Court location across the state for both small claims and guardianship matters. Estates are set to be the next case type to move to the e-filing system, with the roll-out scheduled to occur during the first half of 2017.

Until recently, the plan had been to implement the Superior Court civil cases next. However, a delay with implementation of new judicial bench software, necessary for any case type with a high pleading volume, such as Superior Court civil or Circuit Court marital, required the court to move to another case type with a lower volume of pleadings per case.

Work will begin next month on readying the estate case type, including asking several estate planning lawyers to provide input on the prospective electronic process. Concurrently, work will continue behind the scenes to ready Superior Court civil as the likely case type after estates, provided the judicial bench software issue is resolved.

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**Facts and Figures**

The following data is from the NH Judicial Branch, as of May 20, 2016:

**Guardianships:** The Circuit Court has received 815 guardianship of minor petitions and 515 incapacitated person petitions. Approximately 18 percent of all guardianship petitions have been filed by attorneys.

**Small Claims:** The Circuit Court has received 14,065 small claims complaints; about 53 percent were filed by attorneys.

**Law Firms:** About 600 law firms have filed at least one electronic document.

**Time to Disposition:** It is too early to assess this issue for guardianship cases, but for small claims, disposition data show that since the implementation of e-filing, the time to disposition for small claims has gone down by roughly 20 percent.

**What Else is Happening?**

**Party Access for Filers.** Efforts to develop and implement a mechanism for parties to remotely access their electronic court files are underway. Once completed, this will allow parties (but not the general public at this time) access to their e-filed documents, other parties' e-filed documents, and electronically issued court orders, without having to come to the courthouse kiosk, and without having to save them on their own computers as they are sent and received.

This will be helpful not only for original parties to cases, but also when lawyers appear later in ongoing cases. Those attorneys will be able to see all the case files, not only from the point at which they entered the cases. Spring 2017 is the targeted timeframe for the implementation of "party access."

**NH e-Court Project Improvements**

The NH Circuit Court conducted a week-long outreach effort during the second week of May to obtain suggestions from lawyers and parties about where to focus e-filing improvement efforts this year. This is part of the continuous project improvement efforts the Judicial Branch is committed to on this "forever" initiative.

About 950 survey responses were received through the court's targeted efforts to reach lawyers and non-lawyers. All the responses are now in the process of being analyzed and categorized. The court plans to implement changes wherever possible and catalogue those changes that will need to wait for future opportunities.

**Leadership Transition**

To maintain the focus of the Judicial Branch on the NH e-Court Project, and recognizing the importance of the close and increased involvement of the trial courts in the development of the NH e-Court Project process for future case types, I have agreed to temporarily step aside from my position as senior administrator of the Circuit Court and have accepted a two-year assignment as NH e-Court Project director.

I am looking forward to this new challenge and welcome any questions or suggestions you might have about the NH e-Court Project now and as we move forward. I can be reached [by email](#).

### E-Filing Assistance

In partnership with the NHBA, the NH Judicial Branch is offering "drop in" tutorial sessions at the Bar Center for any lawyers or support staff who will soon start e-filing and/or to those who would like to learn or practice tips to efficiently navigate the e-filing system. Attorneys are invited to bring their laptops and stay for a few minutes or longer. Scheduled sessions are listed below. Further dates will be added as necessary.

- Wednesday, July 20 from noon - 3 p.m.
- Wednesday, Aug. 17 from noon - 3 p.m.

Please RSVP for these sessions to [Kim Brackett](#).



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