

Maricopa Lawyer

Clerk's Corner

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What's Coming in 2012...

Throughout 2012 expect to see more movement from the judicial branch toward electronic filing across courts and case types. The initial structure for electronic filing in Arizona has been developed over the last several years. Fillable forms, eFiling, scanning and electronic access to digitized records have built toward a more streamlined court system.

What We Know

The Administrative Office of the Courts is expected to deploy electronic case initiation through AZTurboCourt this year, which will allow a case to begin with an electronic filing rather than paper and to stay electronic throughout the case. Case initiation requires assigning the next case number in order and submitting payment online, among other factors that took some time to consider and program into a system intended to operate statewide.

The superior court in thirteen of Arizona's counties share a case management system platform, with Pima and Maricopa Counties steadily integrating their systems with the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The results will be more and easier access to records, data and other information from all courts, ranging from the municipal and justice courts to the superior and appellate courts.

Once eFiling becomes more established throughout the state's courts, the judicial branch will be able to develop electronic service of eFiled documents through AZTurboCourt and to develop a standard method for remote access to case records. Unified remote access to statewide court records will require extensive design and input to address the capabilities of such a system, including any restrictions on access and a funding source.

In the Superior Court in Maricopa County, the Clerk's Office will release a new version of its eFiling and case management system in 2012. While most of the changes will be internal, the resulting improvements in speed and efficiency will be apparent to court users. eFiling through the Clerk's system will still be available in criminal cases, limited family court cases and in the tax court until those case types transition to the AZTurboCourt system.

For services at physical locations, the Clerk's Office will experience several moves throughout 2012. The Clerk's criminal exhibits space is consolidating into the new South Court Tower in downtown Phoenix. Criminal exhibits filed at the regional court centers will be available at those locations until the case concludes, at which time they will be transferred to the South Court Tower. Civil exhibits will continue to be stored at the Customer Service Center in downtown Phoenix.

As part of Maricopa County's Capital Improvement budget for FY 2011-12, the Clerk of the Court's office, located in the Central and West Court buildings, in downtown Phoenix will be remodeled. This will include consolidating the family and civil file counters into one location. Construction will take place throughout 2012, with minimal disruption to the public. Upon completion of the remodel, the Clerk's Office will use a queuing system to improve customer service times and eliminate the need to stand in line while waiting to be served.

What We Don't Know

Every year there are proposals to change Arizona's laws and court rules that ultimately impact Clerk operations, which then impacts access to records for customers. The Clerk's Office will monitor and implement those changes as they are finalized. The populations currently under review by interest groups that would impact court record management are victims, minors and vulnerable adults. Access to records or information may change, depending on this year's legislation and court rules.

The Clerk's Office regularly works with customers from around the country and around the world, who either were involved in a case in superior Court while living in Arizona or who are tracking the case of a relative from out of state. As laws, rules and technology continue to change, the Clerk's Office has abilities and limitations to work with customers from near and far. The Office regularly updates information about changes on its website and through its accounts on the social media websites, Twitter and Facebook, both of which are accessible from the Clerk's main website at www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov.

The state's financial situation is one unknown factor about what can be accomplished in 2012. Maricopa County's revenues are currently budgeted to maintain existing services. Changes to state funding or services that counties could be required to provide could also impact services at the county level.

Looking back, 2011 was a productive year filled with many successes. The Clerk's Office overcame many challenges and demonstrated its commitment to innovation. However, there is much more progress to make in 2012 and the Clerk's Office remains committed to outstanding customer service. As someone said, "Don't say the sky is the limit – there are footprints on the moon."