

By Michael K. Jeanes, Clerk of the Superior Court

Changes in probate and juvenile, filing changes in probate cases

On January 2, 2013 the Clerk's Office will change to a drop-filing system for informal probate filings. The existing process has been to review and file-in informal probate filings at the probate filing counters. Time constraints do not allow sufficient review for this process to continue. Implementing the drop-filing system will match the process currently in place in 13 of Arizona's counties.

Beginning January 2, informal probate documents can be filed at the probate filing counters and at the Clerk's satellite facilities around the Valley, including the Central Court Building. This expanded access will allow runner services and couriers to include probate filings in their daily rounds and reduce their trips to multiple locations. The drop-filing process is similar to the depository box filing process.

Documents dropped for filing will receive an acknowledgement form at the time of presentation. Documents will be scanned at the dropped location and will be reviewed by the probate registrar or a deputy registrar within three business days. The probate registrar will accept or decline the documents for filing.

For accepted filings, the notifications, paperwork and letters will be processed at the filing site by a probate specialist. A case number will be assigned, any fees processed and the case will be filed-in. Documents will be available for pick-up at the location where they were dropped for filing. For declined documents, a notification will be completed explaining the deficiency and dismissing the case.

The drop-filing system will improve the quality, consistency and tracking of informal probates in Superior Court. Filing location options will expand to include the Central Court Building in downtown Phoenix while maintaining service at the satellite facilities and expediting customer service at the file counters. New forms will be prepared for implementation, including contact information, the file counter acknowledgement form and acceptance and rejection forms.

Electronic Court Record in Juvenile Cases

On October 1 the Clerk's Office officially began Phase 1 in transitioning from paper records to an electronic court record (ECR) in the juvenile case type. This means paper documents will no longer be placed into a hard copy file. Instead, paper documents will be scanned, audited, and disposed of after a series of quality checks and the ECR will be the official court record. Implementing the ECR in juvenile cases is another major step in

increasing the Office's efficiency and improving service. It will eliminate the need to maintain and store thousands of paper juvenile documents in hard copy files.

The Office first implemented the ECR on January 1, 2007 in adult case types. The Juvenile ECR will be implemented in four phases beginning October 1 and will continue through 2013. Phase 1 includes: 1) scanning of all newly-filed documents in Guardianship cases; and 2) scanning of signed minute entries types and auto filing of unsigned minute entries in all Juvenile case types. Existing Guardianship cases will include both the newly-filed electronic documents as of October 1, 2012 and all previously filed paper documents through September 30, 2012. In addition, minute entries in all Juvenile case types as of October 1, 2012 will be available only in the ECR. Approximately 100 guardianship documents are filed with the Office per day.

Phase II of the implementation will be in seven case types: Adoption Certification (AC), Adoptions (JA), Severance of Parental Rights (JS), Relinquishment of Parental Rights (JI and JR), Emancipation (JE) and Protective Orders (JP); Phase III will be in Dependency cases (JD), and will include electronically transmitting juvenile cases on appeal via the Court to Court application; and the final phase will include Delinquency cases (JV).

The juvenile ECR project does not change the confidentiality of juvenile records. Access to records remains the same, only the format is changing. Juvenile records are available at the Clerk of the Court's juvenile facilities at Durango Street in Phoenix and on Lewis Drive in Mesa.