

Video Conferencing Now Available for Oral Arguments in the Fifth District Court of Appeals

Aletha M. Carver, Esq.

Krugliak, Wilkins, Griffiths & Dougherty Co., L.P.A.



The Fifth District Court of Appeals recently became the first appellate district in Ohio to conduct oral arguments by video conferencing. The Fifth District is comprised of 15 counties covering 7,633 square miles. In May 2015, the Court submitted a tech grant request to the Ohio Supreme Court to request funds for the equipment required

to establish video conferencing in the Court's two satellite offices located in Delaware and Newark.

As justification for the grant, the Court explained the various challenges it faces in timely scheduling oral arguments in pending cases. First, the Court "rides the circuit" hearing oral arguments in all 15 counties. In doing so, the Court must borrow an available courtroom when sitting in any of the counties, except Stark County. Second, the Judges spend a significant amount of time traveling to a number of the counties in the district, with some travel taking two and one-half hours each way. The Ohio Supreme Court reimburses the Judges for the travel and the Judges make a concerted effort to reduce this cost by traveling in the same vehicle. However, this extended travel time reduces the amount of time the Judges have available to work on their caseloads. Third, the change in the Court's docket in recent years has made scheduling cases for oral argument more challenging. While the number of cases being appealed has decreased, cases have become more spread out among the counties.

The Ohio Supreme Court awarded funds under the Court's grant request and the Court set up its two satellite offices with video conferencing capabilities. The use of this technology has made 11 of the 15 counties contiguous to a video conference location and made the remaining 4 counties no more than 2 counties away from a location. The Court uses GoToMeeting software to conduct the video conferencing.

According to Melinda Cooper, Court Administrator/Magistrate, the Court's video conferencing capability not only assists with the normal process of scheduling oral arguments, but it also assists in those situations where a case must be heard on an emergency basis. To date, the Court has successfully used the technology and would like to continue to expand its use. If you find yourself in a situation where you believe video conferencing would be beneficial in your pending appeal, you may want to contact Melinda Cooper, Court Administrator/Magistrate at 330-451-7765.

Aletha M. Carver is a director and member of the Litigation Practice section with the law firm of Krugliak, Wilkins, Griffiths & Dougherty Co., L.P.A. in Canton, Ohio. Aletha received her Juris Doctor from the University of Akron School of Law, and served as a senior staff attorney to the Honorable John W. Wise Fifth District Court of Appeals (1995-2007).