

## SURROGATE'S COURT E-FILING PROTOCOL

The Administrative Judge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District, the Surrogate of Columbia County, and the Chief Clerk of the Columbia County Surrogate Court hereby promulgate local user protocols to assist users in practice of the New York State Courts E-Filing System (hereinafter referred to as "NYSCEF") implemented in the Columbia County Surrogate Court in accordance with the program established by the Chief Administrator of the Courts pursuant to Uniform Rules 207.4a and 207.4aa and provide guidance with respect to local practice and procedures used to process filings, fees, and court calendaring. Users should also review the NYSCEF website ([www.nycourts.gov/efile](http://www.nycourts.gov/efile)). These Protocols do not supersede any statutory or regulatory provisions regarding electronic filing as those are controlling and take precedence.

### 1) Cases Types Eligible for E-Filing:

Mandatory E-Filing: E-filing is mandatory in Administration, Probate, Ancillary, Small Estate, Judicial Settlement, Guardianship, Wrongful Death, and Miscellaneous proceeding types that are commenced in this court on or after February 1, 2021. Except in limited circumstances, all such proceedings must be commenced by filing with the Court electronically through NYSCEF and all subsequent documents in such proceedings must be e-filed.

Hybrid Proceedings: For proceedings that were previously commenced in paper, said proceedings will remain in paper form for all future filings through the completion of that particular proceeding.

Documents Must Be E-Filed: Unless otherwise provided in the e-filing rules, this protocol, or where a special exemption is granted (e.g., Oversized Exhibits in Section 3, below) all documents to be filed with the court in a NYSCEF case must be filed with the NYSCEF system.

### 2) Non-Participation in E-Filing:

• Exemptions from Mandatory E-Filing: An attorney who certifies in good faith that he or she lacks the equipment or knowledge needed to e-file and has no staff member or employee under his or her direction who has such knowledge and equipment may opt out of e-filing in each mandatory proceeding by filing an opt out form<sup>1</sup> with the Clerk. Attorneys also may be exempted by the court for good cause shown. Proposed intervenors (non-attorneys) and unrepresented non-parties are exempt from e-filing. (Uniform Rule § 207.4-aa(e)(1)). Unrepresented litigants are exempt from e-filing, but may choose to participate. (CPLR § 2111)

### 3) E-Filing Documents in Surrogate's Court:

• Essential Step Prior to E-Filing: Prior to entering any information into an initial filing, you should run an inquiry on the decedent's last name, using the first initial, to determine

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<sup>1</sup> All forms referred to in the Protocol are available on the Forms page of the NYSCEF website at <https://iappscontent.courts.state.ny.us/NYSCEF/live/forms.htm>

if a file is already open. Due to the numbering system in Surrogate's Court, an inquiry based on the file number alone may not produce accurate results. In addition, you should ascertain whether there may be another Will for the decedent on file with the Court (e.g., filed for safekeeping).

- Initial Entering of Case Information: Any error in the initial entry of case information can significantly delay the proceeding. Please double check to be sure to select the same county as is shown on your papers.

The case name must be entered as follows:

- Initial entry must be identical to the signature on the Will
- If the name on the death certificate is different, that becomes an "a/k/a"
- If the name on the Will does not match the signature, that becomes an "a/k/a"
- **No punctuation or spaces should be used when entering the name or "a/k/a"**

- Notice of Hard-Copy Submission: Where, within the e-filing rules, an attorney or an unrepresented litigant who is participating in e-filing submits a document in hard copy, the document must bear a Notice of Hard Copy Submission – E-Filed Proceeding (see NYSCEF Forms page). Attorneys who are exempt from e-filing are required to attach this form to all hard copy filings, while unrepresented litigants who are not participating in e-filing are not so required.

- Request for Surrogate's Court Action: Not required.

- Death Certificates: In addition to e-filing the death certificate, a certified hard copy, must be filed within two (2) business days of e-filing. The certified copy will be returned after the submission is processed. Death certificates for predeceased distributees are required by this Court and can be e-filed without needing to file certified hard copies with the Court.

- Wills: Scan the original Will, but DO NOT UNSTAPLE it. File the original paper Will within two (2) business days of e-filing. Include a Staple Affidavit as a separate document if there is evidence of the staples/grommets having been removed.

- Citations: If needed, submit a proposed citation electronically through NYSCEF only. The Court will complete the citation and upload the completed version to NYSCEF as quickly as possible. An e-mail notification will be sent when the completed citation is posted to NYSCEF. After receipt of the notification, print the citation and serve it, in accordance with the SCPA or Order for alternative service. Service of the Citation should be accompanied by a Notice of Commencement of Proceeding Subject to Mandatory Electronic Filing. (See Forms page on NYSCEF site.)

- Decrees and Orders: The Court Clerk will request a proposed Decree or Order if needed. Otherwise, the Court will prepare the Decree/Order. Once the Decree or Order is signed, the court will upload the signed version to NYSCEF and notify all consenting parties that the Decree or Order has been signed and posted. Users who have requested a certified copy of the decree or order and have paid the appropriate fee via NYSCEF will receive the certified copy by regular mail.

- Stipulations: Stipulations submitted for purposes of being "so ordered" by the Court shall be electronically filed.

- Oversized Exhibits: If an exhibit or attachment is unsuited for electronic filing (e.g., a large map or a videotape), it shall be submitted to the court and served on the other parties in hard copy. Attach a Notice of Hard Copy Submission – E-Filed Proceeding. In addition, a Notice of Hard Copy Exhibit must be completed and electronically filed. (See Forms page on the NYSCEF site.)

- Working Copies: Not required.

- Payment: This court accepts payment of filing fees required by the SCPA by credit card payments made via NYSCEF or by payments made at the court by check or cash. A processing fee of 2.9% will be charged by NYSCEF for use of the credit card method.

Filing fees are calculated in accordance with SCPA § 2402 based on the documents filed with NYSCEF and the representation of the filer regarding the size of the estate. Review by the Court may result in a modification of the fees initially anticipated or charged in connection with this transaction. In the event of any such modification, the Court will contact the filing user by e-mail with the proper amount and request an additional fee, if applicable. Some courts will not allow the filing of additional documents by the filer if the filer owes an outstanding fee in that proceeding.

If choosing to pay by credit card at time of filing on NYSCEF website, enter credit card information directly on website. You must insert the credit card information with each filing; your credit card will be charged at the time of filing. Make sure credit limit is large enough to cover anticipated filings.

If choosing to pay at the court, be aware that documents are not “filed” until payment is received. The court cannot process the filing until payment is received in full and will delete the filing if payment is not made within ten (10) business days.

- 4) Notifications: Notification of compliance requirements will be made by e-mail or telephone, depending on the circumstances. Clerks/staff are available for consultation during regular business hours.

Phone: 518-267-3149

Email: [columbiasurrogate@nycourts.gov](mailto:columbiasurrogate@nycourts.gov)

- Return of Requested Documents: To ensure rapid return of documents you have requested from Surrogate's Court, the court requires pre-paid self-addressed envelopes. If self-addressed stamped envelopes are not provided, the court will require the documents be picked up by appointment in our office.

- Certificates and Letters: The court will mail out Letters and requested Certificates of Appointment. Prepaid, self-addressed envelopes must be provided. Users must request and pay for certificates in advance.

- General Correspondence: All general correspondence, adjournment requests, and conference requests shall be electronically filed, **with an additional copy delivered to the Chief Clerk at [kajorgen@nycourts.gov](mailto:kajorgen@nycourts.gov).**

- 5) Signatures: Documents requiring signatures shall be considered to be signed under the circumstances outlined in Uniform Rule §207.4-a(f). When e-filing a document bearing an actual signature, the e-filer is responsible for maintaining the original, executed document pursuant to Uniform Rule 207.4-a(f)(2).

- 6) Sealed Documents, Sealed Cases; Documents Presented for In Camera Review:

- Applying for a Sealing Order: A party who wishes to file a document under seal, a hard copy of the document must be filed, along with the "Notice of Hard Copy Submission" with the Surrogate's Court. Unless the document is being filed ex parte, the filing party shall serve all parties with hard copies of the document, along with the "Notice of Hard Copy Submission" form, in the traditional manner. (See Forms page on the NYSCEF site.)

If the Court grants the sealing request, the Surrogate Clerk will then file the documents in the appropriate manner, as directed. If the application is denied, an order will be issued that directs the party to file the document electronically.

- In Camera Documents: Documents submitted to the Court for in camera review should be delivered to the Court in a sealed envelope conspicuously marked "FOR IN CAMERA REVIEW BY THE COURT" with a Notice of Hard Copy Submission form attached. (See Forms page on the NYSCEF web site.)

7) Decrees, Orders, and Judgments:

Decrees, orders, and judgments will be signed in hard copy by the Surrogate and forwarded to the Clerk for filing and scanning into the NYSCEF system, which will then transmit notification to all parties. However, the notification does not constitute service of notice of filing upon any party (see, Uniform Rule § 207.4-a[h]).

**If you have a question on how to “efile”, please send an email to [nyscef@nycourts.gov](mailto:nyscef@nycourts.gov) or call 646-386-3033**