

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY SURROGATE'S COURT E-FILING PROTOCOL

The Administrative Judge of the Fourth Judicial District, the Surrogate of St. Lawrence County, and the Chief Clerk of the St. Lawrence County Surrogate's 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 St. Lawrence 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. These are to 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). These Protocols do not supersede any statutory or regulatory provisions regarding electronic filing as those are controlling and take precedence.

1) Case Types Eligible for E-Filing:

Mandatory E-Filing: E-filing is mandatory in all types of new proceedings for Probate, Administration and Voluntary Administration that are commenced in this court on or after May 26, 2021. Guardianship and Adoption proceedings are not subject to mandatory e-filing requirements. Except in limited circumstances, all mandatory e-filing 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:

A party must not use the NYSCEF System to electronically file documents in proceedings that were not commenced electronically. All proceedings, even those listed above which commenced prior to May 26, 2021, must continue to conclusion as hard copy paper filings. In other words, a proceeding that started as a paper case continues to be and will remain a paper case.

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 form¹ 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, users should run an inquiry on the decedent's last name, using the first initial, to determine if a file is already open in NYSCEF. Due to the file numbering system in Surrogate's Court, an inquiry based on the file number alone may not produce accurate results. In addition, you must contact the Court to ascertain whether there is a paper proceeding with the court or existing another Will of 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 verify that you have selected "ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY" as the venue 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 "AKA";
- If the name on the will does not match the signature, that becomes an "AKA";
- No punctuation or spaces should be used when entering the name or "AKA".

- **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:**

This court requires the "Request for Surrogate's Court Action" (*see* NYSCEF Forms page) as the first document uploaded with each filing. This is to be filed as a stand-alone document. Do not scan any other documents with the Request.

For subsequent filings, do not re-use the original Request form. Prepare a new form for each filing with the appropriate information entered. If requesting court certified documents or Certificates of Appointment, use a "Request for Surrogate's Court Action Non-Proceeding Relief" (p.2 of the Request form). Do not submit a blank Request for Surrogate's Court Action form.

¹ 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>

- Death Certificates:

In addition to e-filing the death certificate, the original death certificate must be filed within two (2) business days of e-filing. If mailing the death certificate to the Court, it must be post-marked within two (2) business days of e-filing.

- Wills:

The original paper Will/Codicil and Affidavits of Attesting Witnesses must be filed directly with Surrogate's Court within two (2) business days of e-filing. If mailing those documents, they must be post-marked within two (2) business days of e-filing. The Will/Codicil must also be scanned and e-filed. As always, **DO NOT REMOVE** the staples from the original Will/Codicil when scanning. If staples are removed, you must include a staple affidavit. The court will upload the Will/Codicil to NYSCEF within two (2) business days after the filing of the hard copy original(s).

- Citations:

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. If your proposed citation requires amendment, you will be notified. Otherwise, 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. Service of the citation should be accompanied by a "Notice of Commencement of Proceeding Subject to Mandatory Electronic Filing" or a "Notice Regarding Availability of Electronic Filing", as the case may be. (*See* Forms page on NYSCEF site.)

- Decrees and Orders:

E-file proposed decrees and orders through NYSCEF only. If the proposed Decree or Order requires amendment, the court will advise accordingly. 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. Following review, it will be uploaded to NYSCEF and the parties will be notified that it has been signed and posted.

- 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:

As a rule, hard copies of the documents submitted, also known as working copies, are not required. The court may, upon notice, require that certain e-filed documents be submitted to the Court in hard copy. When such a request is made, the filer must attach proof that the document has been e-filed (*e.g.*, the thank-you page or the e-mail notification) to the back of all working copies submitted to the court. Working copies must be exact copies of the e-filed documents. They do not become part of the official record and will be destroyed by chambers at the disposition of the case.

4) Payments:

This court accepts payment of fees required by the SCPA by credit card payments made via NYSCEF or by payments made at the court. There are no fees to use the NYSCEF System, **nevertheless the Court System charges a 2.99% non-refundable service fee** for payments by credit card. Filing Fees are calculated in accordance with SCPA § 2402 based on the documents filed with NYSCEF and the representation of the filing user regarding the value 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. This court 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. As indicated above, there is a 2.99% service fee for use of credit card. Users should verify the card 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. **Please be advised** that the Court will delete the filing if payment is not made within **ten (10) days**.

5) Notifications:

Notification of defective filings will be sent out by e-mail or by telephone, depending on the circumstances.

- Return of Requested Documents: To ensure rapid return of documents you have requested from Surrogate’s Court, the court will keep your pre-paid self-addressed envelopes on file. When filing your Request for Surrogate’s Court Action, you should indicate that the item should be returned to you in the self-addressed envelopes located at the Court.

- Certificates and Letters: Upon request made via NYSCEF, the court will mail out Certificates and Letters. Users must request and pay for certificates in advance for all e-filed proceedings.

•General Correspondence: All general correspondence, adjournment requests and conference requests shall be electronically filed.

6) **Signatures**:

Documents requiring signatures shall be considered 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).

7) **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 must file a hard copy of the document, 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.)

8) **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]).

Court issued Letters and Certificates of Appointment will be provided in hard copy to the filer via the usual means (SASE, USPS mailing, messenger). If the court requires a “Request for Surrogate’s Court Action” form, the method of contact/return should be noted on that form.

9) **Contact Information**

NYSCEF Resource Center: nyscef@nycourts.gov or call 646-386-4906
St. Lawrence County Surrogate’s Court: 315-379-2217