

## SOUTHERN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

RE: Instructions for News Coverage for Court Proceedings

Proceedings of the Superior Courts of the Southern Judicial Circuit, held in the Courtrooms of the various County Courthouses within said Circuit, shall not be broadcast by television and radio and shall not be photographed by still and moving cameras unless approved by the Court in accordance with the following procedures.

(a) Persons desiring to broadcast, televise, tape, record or photograph official Court proceedings must make a timely request to the Clerk of Court, on a written form substantially in accordance with the following ORDER, at least seventy-two (72) hours prior to the proceeding and specifying the particular case for which the coverage is requested. The Clerk shall immediately forward such request to the Judge who is to preside over such proceeding for his approval or disapproval. A separate request shall be made for each trial, case or hearing. In extraordinary circumstances the Court may, in its sole discretion, grant a waiver of the aforesaid seventy-two (72) hour requirement. Such Judge shall approve or disapprove the request and return same to the Clerk for filing in the case. Said request shall be evaluated pursuant to the standards set forth in O.C.G.A. § 15-1-10.1. The reporter or technician may then obtain a copy of the form from the Clerk after it is signed by the Judge.

(b) The Court may, in its discretion and without giving any reason therefore, approve and allow or disapprove and disallow, the broadcasting, televising, taping, recording or photographing of any proceeding or portion thereof. The decision of the Court in this respect shall be final and shall not be questioned. If disapproved or disallowed by the Court, same shall not be broadcast, televised, taped, recorded or photographed, as the case may be in accordance with the Court's directive concerning same.

If consent has been given by the Court for coverage of a proceeding or portion thereof, the Court may, at anytime and in its sole discretion, in the interest of fairness and justice, withdraw the consent for coverage of all or any portion of the proceeding.

(c) When consent to cover a proceeding shall be granted by the Court pursuant to these procedures, such shall be without partiality or preference to any person, news agency or type of coverage. However, consent may be given, refused or withdrawn as to one type or types of coverage in the discretion of the Court.

(d) The presiding Judge may, in his sole discretion, require pooled coverage which would allow only one still photographer, one television camera and one radio or tape recorder outlet. The reporters and technicians shall be expected to work out pool coverage and present to the presiding Judge a schedule of the pool coverage prior to the time scheduled for the subject case, trial or hearing to be heard by the Court. If the news agencies cannot agree on such a schedule, the presiding Judge may refuse any photographing, broadcasting, televising, taping or recording or the Judge may, if he chooses, assign his own schedule of pool coverage.

(e) The positioning, movement and removal of technicians, reporters, cameras and equipment shall be done as quietly as possible before the Court is called to order or during a recess of the proceedings and in no event shall such be done while the Court is conducting proceedings in the Courtroom. The reporters and technicians shall have their equipment in place and ready to operate before the Court is called to order.

(f) Overhead lights shall be switched on and off by Court personnel only. No other lights, flashbulbs, flashes or sudden light changes may be used unless the Court approves beforehand. No television lighting shall be installed in the Courtroom without prior written consent of the presiding Judge and if allowed shall be turned on before the Court is called to order.

(g) No adjustments in the Court's central audio system shall be made except by persons authorized by the Court. Upon prior approval of the Court, other microphones may be added in an unobtrusive manner to the Court's public address system.

(h) All television cameras and all tape recorders shall be assigned to a specific area in the Courtroom by the presiding Judge, shall be restricted to that area and will never be moved during Court proceedings. Still photographers may sit anywhere authorized by the Court, but once there, they cannot move, except during recess. The presiding Judge may designate a still photographer's area or may allow still photographers to join the public in Court.

(I) Still photographers shall never use a motor-driven film advance. Television cameras and recording devices must be quiet running. If any equipment is determined by the Judge to be of such noise as to be distracting to the Court proceedings, then such equipment shall be excluded.

(j) Reporters shall not conduct interviews in the Courtroom until after the presiding Judge has left the Courtroom. The presiding Judge may, in his discretion, disallow any or all interviews in the Courtroom.

(k) Photographers and those operating television cameras shall never take pictures of the jury, but recordings of the jury foreman's statements to the Court may be made. Photographs and televising of the public and the Courtroom are allowed, if done without disruption to the Court proceedings.

(l) Reporters, photographers and technicians must have and produce upon request of Court officials credentials identifying them and the media company for which they work. Only those previously approved by the Court shall be allowed to participate in the coverage of a proceeding.

(m) Reporters, photographers and technicians must keep in mind that the most important factor in covering a Court proceeding is not getting the story, but preserving the dignity and decorum of the Court and not impeding or diminishing the right of a fair trial to the parties involved in the proceedings before the Court.

(n) In the event there is an unusual problem among the reporters, photographers and technicians present, such as the failure of the central audio system or some other equipment failure, one of their number shall be nominated to tell the Court about it, but this shall be done only at a recess. Court proceedings shall never be interrupted by a reporter, photographer, technician or other news persons covering the proceedings.

(o) A violation of any of the procedures for coverage of any proceedings shall be grounds for the offending reporter, photographer, technician or media person, to be removed from the Courtroom, subject the offender to the penalties of contempt and be grounds for the Court to bar such offender from broadcasting, televising, taping, recording or photographing Court proceedings in this Circuit in the future. These procedures for electronic and photographic news coverage of Court proceedings shall not be applicable to the officers and employees of the Court in the conduct of their official Court duties.