

RUTHERFORD COUNTY CIRCUIT CIVIL COURT ELECTRONIC FILING RULES

(E-FILING RULES)

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PART 1 – AUTHORITY

In accordance with Rule 5B of the Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure, The Circuit Civil Court of Rutherford Tennessee for the Sixteenth Judicial District adopts electronic filing. Pleadings and other electronic documents filed electronically in the Circuit Civil Court shall be considered filed the same as court documents filed in paper format.

PART 2 – SHORT TITLE

These rules may be cited as “Rutherford County Circuit Civil Court E-Filing Rules.”

PART 3 – DEFINITIONS

The following terms in these E-Filing Rules shall be defined as follows:

“Authorized Users” means the following persons who, upon completion of the registration requirements or user account configuration, may E-File documents:

- a. Attorneys licensed to practice law in Tennessee.
- b. Pro Se litigants.
- c. Law Enforcement Officers.
- d. Process Servers.
- e. Agents of Governmental entities.
- f. Special appointed agents for Domestic Violence Support.
- g. All Court judges and their staffs; and
- h. The Clerk and all deputy clerks of the Clerk's Office.

"Clerk" means the Circuit Court Clerk of Rutherford County.

"Clerk's Office" means the office of the Circuit Court Clerk in the Rutherford County Judicial Building.

"Convenience Fee" is a statutory fee charged in connection with electronic filing that is addition to statutory filing fees. Such a fee is charged in connection with payment by credit card or ACH. (See Section 12 below)

"Case Management System" or "CMS" means a computer system operated by the Clerk's Office which maintains all case information. For the Circuit Court Clerk of Rutherford County, the CMS is TnCIS.

"Court Administrator" means the Circuit Court Deputy Clerk designated by the Circuit Court Clerk to administer TnCIS, the DMS, and internal users.

"Court" means the Circuit Civil Court of Rutherford County and the Circuit Court Judges or the Chancellor.

"Document" means a pleading, motion, application, request, exhibit, brief, memorandum of law, paper, or other instrument in paper form or electronic form which is permitted to be filed pursuant to the TRCP and the Local Rules.

"Document Management System" or "DMS" means a computer system operated by the Clerk's Office which maintains all electronic and scanned paper documents filed in the Court in electronic form.

"E-file" or "E-filing" means the electronic transmission of original documents to the Court, and from the Court, for the purposes of recording information and Court documents to a Court case or other official Court purposes. For purposes of these rules, e-filing does not include the filing of faxed documents.

"E-Filer" is an authorized user who has a Court approved E-Filing login, username, and password allowing E-Filing of documents into the Court's CMS and DMS.

“Electronic Court Filing System” or “ECF” means the software and services provided to authorized users to E-file, review filings, and process information that is recorded to the Court’s CMS and DMS.

“E-Filing Fee” is the fee an attorney or pro se litigant pays for using the E-Filing system. This is in addition to the convenience fee charged by the credit card processor and the statutory filing fee (See Section 12 below).

“E-Filing Rules” means the Rutherford County Circuit Civil Court E-Filing Rules.

“Local Rules” means the rules of the Chancery and Circuit Courts of Rutherford County, Tennessee for the Sixteenth Judicial District.

“Notice of Association” means a method provided by the ECF that a pro se filer will use to link the ECF authorized user account to a case participant in TnCIS.

“Notice of Electronic Filing” or “NEF” means an electronic notice distributed by the ECF to authorized users when court documents are E-filed to a case. The notices are specific to a case and are distributed to case participants or their legal representatives who are registered in the ECF System, recorded in TnCIS as a case participant, and are linked between ECF and TnCIS.

“Party” or “Parties” means any person, including an individual, executor, administrator, or other personal representative, corporation, partnership, association or any other legal, governmental, or commercial entity, whether organized under the laws of this State who is a party in a case pending in the Court and is represented by an attorney or acting pro se.

“PDF” or “Portable Document Format” means a computer file format developed by Adobe Systems for representing documents in a manner that is independent of the original application software, hardware and operating system used to create those documents. Converted Documents must contain the “.pdf” file extension.

“Public Access Terminal” means a publicly accessible computer provided by the Circuit Court Clerk for the purposes of allowing E-filing and viewing of public electronic court records. The public access terminal shall be in the Circuit Civil Clerk’s Office and made available during normal business hours. The Circuit Civil Clerk’s Office may also offer printed copies of the electronic court records and apply relevant copying fees as permitted by relevant statutory and court rules.

“Statutory Fees” means those normal filing fees charged by the Court to file a lawsuit and other usual fees charged by the Court during the course of the case.

“System Administrator” means the Tybera Development Group, Inc. management team that supports the Court Administrator and the registration and support of authorized users.

“Terms of Use Agreement” means the agreement established by the Clerk(s) that sets forth the parameters for the use of the ECF System by all Authorized Users.

“TnCIS” or “CMS” means the Tennessee Case Information System or Case Management System software supported by Local Government, owned, and controlled by the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts, used to manage, and record case information specific to Tennessee.

“Traditional Filing” is a process by which a party files a paper document with the Clerk.

“TRCP” means the Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure.

“User Guide” means the recommendations and modifications to procedures specific to the court. All E-Filers should periodically check the Circuit Civil Court Website <circuitcourtclerk.rutherfordcountyttn.gov> for updates to the User’s Guide. The ECF system will provide a Filer’s User Manual specific to how to use the ECF System that will function for State courts in all counties.

PART 4 – EFFECT ON EXISTING LOCAL RULES

These E-Filing Rules are adopted as an Appendix to the Local Rules of the Court and not supersede or replace any other Local Rules of the Court.

PART 5 – ELECTRONIC FILING ENCOURAGED UNLESS PROHIBITED BY ORDER OF THE COURT

- (a) E-Filing of documents is strongly encouraged by the Court except as provided by subsection (b) below, a document that can be traditionally filed with the Court may be E-filed.
- (b) The Court or the Clerk may exclude documents and/or certain types of cases from E-Filing. Notice of these excluded documents and/or cases will be provided on the Court’s E-Filing Website <circuitcourtclerk.rutherfordcountyttn.gov>.

PART 6 – SCOPE OF RULES

- (a) Except as expressly provided herein, for all new cases filed on or after the effective date of these E-Filing Rules, the Court shall accept as validly filed all documents that are filed though E-Filing.
- (b) The Court and the Clerk may issue, file, and serve notices, orders, and other documents electronically, subject to the provisions of the E-Filing Rules.
- (c) E-Filers may obtain access to the E-Filing Website either through an internet access point or by using the Clerk’s Public Access Terminal located in the Clerk’s Office.

PART 7- ELECTRONIC CASE FILE

The Clerk shall maintain all E-Filed documents that are reviewed and approved in electronic format as part of the official case file.

PART 8 – REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

- (a) Persons who qualify as authorized users and who desire to electronically file a document shall register as an E-Filer on the ECF Website. The registration process requires the prospective user to accept the user agreement, identify their role for the account, enter their personal information, their username and password, and submit the request. Attorneys must include a valid Tennessee issued Bar Number. There is an approval process that will occur. Once the approval process is completed the user will receive an email notifying them that their account is approved. The user must then register their payment options and credit card with the ECF system and the Court. If the user does not receive an email the user can determine if their account is activated by logging into the ECF website.
- (b) E-Filers shall change their E-Filing profile immediately upon any change in firm name, delivery address, phone number, fax number or email address.
- (c) Attorneys who intent to practice Pro Hac Vice are not allowed to register. Out of State Attorneys who are not admitted to the Bar in Tennessee are required to associate with an attorney who has a Tennessee issued Bar number, and they must follow the rules for participating in a case.

PART 9 – TIME AND EFFECT OF E-FILING

Any E-Filed document shall be considered as filed with the Clerk once the transmission of the entire document is received and approved by the Clerk. Any document received by the Clerk before midnight local time of the Clerk's Office shall be deemed filed on that date if such document otherwise meets all the requirements for filing under the relevant rules of the Court. Upon approval by the Clerk of an E-Filed document, the ECF system shall electronically transmit a Transaction Receipt indicating that the E-Filing has been filed. The Transaction Receipt shall serve as proof of filing. In the event the Clerk rejects the submitted document following review, the rejected document shall not become part of the official Court record and the E-Filer will receive status on the submission of the rejection. E-Filer's may be required to re-file the document to meet necessary filing requirements.

Documents that are rejected and filed again will receive a new effective date, upon approval, based on when the corrected documents were E-Filed.

PART 10 – FORM OF DOCUMENTS ELECTRONICALLY FILED

- (a) Each E-Filed document shall be uploaded in a PDF format unless it is a Proposed Order for a judge to review. The document should be formatted in accordance with the applicable Terms of Use Agreement as well as the TRCP and Local Rules Governing formatting of paper documents and in such other and further format as the Court may require from time to time. Proposed Orders can be E-Filed in Microsoft Word format.
- (b) The E-Filer is responsible for verifying that the documents to be E-Filed are legible. Documents that are not legible or scanned sideways will be rejected and will require the E-Filer to correct the documents and E-File them again. The corrected documents will be date and time stamped according to the date and time of E-Filing the corrected documents.
- (c) In addition to the information required by TRCP Rule 11 and any other Local Rule, the Part or attorney signing a document that is being E-Filed shall also follow the requirements in Part 13.

PART 11 – NOTICE OF ELECTRONIC FILING (NEF)

When a person E-Files to a case, whether they are a case participant or not, notifications of the E-Filing are distributed to Authorized Users that are recorded in TnCIS as case participants or legal representatives. To receive notifications participants must be Authorized Users and have an active account in the ECF System. For the notification to recognize the association of an Authorized User to a case they must be recorded on the case in TnCIS as a pro se litigant or as a legal representative with a Bar Number. TnCIS only maintains Tennessee issued Bar Numbers.

All Authorized Users agree to receive their notices of documents which are E-Filed in their cases electronically through the ECF system.

All Authorized Users must include a Certificate of Service on each pleading filed just as if it had been filed on paper.

Pro se litigants recorded in TnCIS on a case must be registered Authorized Users in ECF and have previously filed a Notice of Association that links the ECF user account to the TnCIS participant ID.

The NEF does not replace the need for service of process. The NEF satisfies the responsibility of a filer to send service to other parties that are registered in the ECF System and linked as participants on the case for secondary filings. This service does not replace the responsibility of E-Filers to notify parties by conventional means when they are not registered in the ECF system. The ECF system provides a method to identify what case participants are Authorized Users and recorded in TnCIS as participants in the case.

The NEF is distributed as an email and posted in the ECF web interface for access. It is incumbent on each filer to keep the NEF in his/her permanent files as proof of notice. It is the responsibility of each Authorized User to login to the ECF and review their NEFs within ninety days (90) from the time the NEF is posted to their user account. After ninety days, all NEFs are deleted from the Authorized User's account.

PART 12 – PAYMENT OF FEES

- (a) All E-Filed Documents subject to statutory filing fees (Court Costs) shall require payment of such filing fees immediately upon filing unless excused by the Court. These filing fees must be paid with a credit card at the time of E-Filing. Use of the E-Filing Website constitutes E-Filer's consent to process or charge the credit card supplied.
- (b) It is the responsibility of the Authorized User to refer to the Circuit Civil Clerk's website <> to determine the fees owed. The ECF system will not calculate the fees in this release of the E-Filing system (release one). When the ECF system provides an estimate in later releases the clerk is still responsible for calculation of the fees which may be different from the estimates. This can occur when the clerk corrects information entered by the filer.
- (c) The E-Filing Fee is in addition to the statutory filing fees and is \$5.00 per filing up to a maximum of \$50.00 per case or a flat \$300.00 subscription fee per lawyer or pro se litigant for a one-year period starting on the date the flat fee is paid. The flat fees pay all the E-Filing fees for all cases filed by that lawyer or pro se litigant in any Court in the State using the Tybera E-Filing System. The E-Filing Fee shall not be assessed against the State, a party declared indigent or to that indigent's party's legal representative.
- (d) The convenience fee pursuant to T.C.A. Sec. 9-1-108(c)(4) & (5), is charged to E-Filers in addition to the statutory filing fee and the E-Filing Fee. The convenience fee covers the cost of processing the credit card. The amount of that fee will appear with each credit card transaction.
- (e) Authorized users will be able to access their cases as well as any other cases in the system that are not under seal and make copies of documents in those files. Certified and paper copies will be available from the Clerk's office for the statutory fees.

- (f) Refunds due to improper collection will require the E-Filer to contact the Clerk's Office directly. The Clerk will issue checks for refunds. Refunds will not be made in cash.
- (g) Refunds on a case will be paid to the owner of the credit card used to make the payment.

PART 13 – SIGNATURES

- (a) A document that is required to be, verified by a notary public, sworn to, or made under oath, or one that requires multiple signatures may be E-Filed on as a scanned image of the original. The original document shall be maintained by the Party, or the attorney E-Filing the document and shall be made available upon reasonable notice, for inspection by other counsel, the Clerk, or the Court. Parties or their attorneys shall retain originals until final disposition of the case and the expiration of all appeal opportunities.
- (b) Any document filed with an electronic signature must be filed using the user account of the individual electronically signing the document. Any document signed and filed using the account that matches the signature is considered binding on that individual even if that user shares their username and password.
- (c) For all other documents that generally include an attorney's or pro se E-Filer's signature the following pattern is to be used:

/s/John Doe (Authorized User's name) and TN Bar No. (if any attorney)
123 Main Street (Authorized User's Street address)
City, State, Zip Code

PART 14 – REDACTION

Authorized Users must be sensitive to confidential and personal information filed publicly, not under seal. E-Filers shall refrain from including, or shall redact as follows where inclusion is necessary, the following personal identifiers from all documents filed publicly with the Clerk, including exhibits thereto, unless required by statute or otherwise ordered by the Court.

It is the responsibility of the Authorized User to redact all documents that are E-Filed to the Court. When a document required to E-Filed includes sensitive data that otherwise would be redacted, the Authorized User must file an original and a redacted version. The redacted version will be stored for public access:

- (a) Social Security Number. If a social security number must be included in a document, only the last four digits of that number must be used.

- (b) Dates of Birth. If an individual's date of birth must be included in a document, only the year must be used.
- (c) Financial Account Numbers. If financial account numbers are relevant, only the last four digits of these numbers must be used.
- (d) Names of Minors. If a case includes a minor this information needs to be protected from the public, the Authorized User should use a pseudo name in the documents and then file a sealed document with the actual names.

The Clerk will not review each document for redaction.

In addition, exercise caution when filing documents that contain the following:

- (1) Personal identifying number, such as a driver's license number.
- (2) Medical Records, treatment and diagnosis.
- (3) Employment History.
- (4) Individual Financial Information.
- (5) Proprietary or Trade Secret Information.

It is the responsibility of E-Filers to be sure that all documents comply with the rules of the Court requiring redaction of personal identifiers. The Clerk will not review each document for redaction.

PART 15 – SYSTEM OR USER FILING ERRORS

If the E-Filing does not reach a status of RECEIVED because of; (1) an error in the transmission of the document to the Clerk which was unknown to the sending party, (2) a failure to process the electronic document when received by the Clerk, (3) rejection by the Court or Clerk, or (4) other technical problems experienced by the E-Filer or the Clerk, the Court may, upon satisfactory proof, enter an order permitting the document to be filed nunc pro tunc to the date the document was first attempted to be filed electronically and may also extend the date for any response or the period within which any right, duty, or other act must be performed.

PART 16 – ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE PROCEDURES

The Circuit Civil Court of Rutherford County, Sixteenth Judicial District has approved procedures for electronic submission of evidence. Cite these procedures as "E-Evidence Procedures" or "EEP"

Scope and Application

- (a) Electronic Evidence as defined below for use in any trial, hearing or motion docket may (temporarily not mandatory) be submitted using Electronic Court Filing System "ECF." These EEP apply in all cases, contested matters and adversary proceedings.
- (b) While the Court strongly encourages evidence to be submitted electronically, evidence will be accepted by the Court or Clerk of the Court through traditional methods on a temporary basis until such time that the Court orders that evidence will only be accepted electronically. Ample notice will be given of such a requirement. Evidence that is submitted in court during a hearing and which is amenable to scanning will be scanned by the clerk, entered in the electronic file, and returned to the attorney or pro se litigant who submitted it to the Court. Maintaining all original copies of the evidence, whether filed electronically or in paper will be the responsibility of the filer.
- (c) Evidence that is impractical or impossible to submit in electronic format – such as physical objects, original documents when required and oversized documents not capable of conversion to a format listed below – are not subject to EEP.

Definitions:

- (a) ECF – Electronic Court Filing System maintained by the Circuit Civil Court.
- (b) Electronic Evidence – Includes, but is not limited to, documents, diagrams, charts, photographs, audio file, video files, e-mails, texts, and power points that are electronically submitted for use at a trial, hearing, or motion docket.
- (c) Filer- An Authorized User who has an E-Filing approved username and password allowing E-Filing of documents into the Document Management System (DMS) through the ECF.
- (d) Flatten a PDF document – PDF documents may be editable fields. Flattening a PDF document means to eliminate all editable fields from the PDF document so that it cannot be modified other than by adding a date stamp.

Electronic Format Requirements:

- (a) Allowable Formats. All electronic evidence must be submitted in one of the following formats:
 - PDF
 - PNG, GIF, JPD/JPEG
 - WMV
 - MP3
 - PPT/PPTX

Any of the allowable formats can be compressed into a ZIP file.

- (b) File size. The maximum file size for exhibits is 10.0 megabytes (MB). Exhibits may be compressed in ZIP format only. Any compressed exhibit file shall not exceed 10 MB. If

an exhibit file must exceed 10.0 MB, the file shall be provided to the Court Clerk on a thumb drive the same day that other exhibit files are submitted. Parties submitting files larger than 10.0 MB must also provide the file(s) on thumb drive to all other parties due to receive them and must comply with requirements of the Document Management Protocol (DMP) below.

- (c) Disabling of Security Features. Any security features in an exhibit file, such as passwords, locked or editing features, must be disabled.
- (d) All PDF documents must be flattened.

Document Management Protocol (DMP):

- (a) For any trial, hearing, or motion docket all parties must access the exhibits using the ECF.
- (b) Timing of Submission – Trials, Hearings, and Motion Dockets. Except as provided in a pretrial order.
 - (1) All evidence must be submitted no later than 48 hours before trial, hearing or motion docket using ECF.
 - (2) Parties are to confer concerning the admissibility of electronic evidence and 48 hours before a trial, hearing or motion docket designate in ECF exhibits to admitted by stipulation.
 - (3) Upon request, originals are to be made available for inspection.

(c) Identifying Exhibits

The following format must be used when submitting electronic evidence.

- (1) Exhibit Number or Letter. Descriptive Exhibit Name. The first component of the file name shall be a number or letter, depending on the party's role.
 - (A) Plaintiffs/Movants shall use numbers.
 - (B) Defendant/Respondents shall use letter. If the alphabet is exhausted, then letters will repeat. For Example: "AA" or "AAA"
- (2) Descriptive Exhibit Name. The second component of the file name shall be a brief description of the exhibit. It should be sufficiently descriptive to identify the exhibit and it should not contain any information the filer does not want displayed to the Court or to other parties.
- (3) Format of File. The third component of the file name is the extension which shall identify the format of the file as listed above under electronic formats required.
- (4) File Name Examples: (File names must be continuous and not have spaces or periods).
 - (A) Example of Plaintiff/Movant exhibits:
 - 1_Deposition_of_Jane Doe_pdf
 - 2_Photo_of_Jack_Miller_Jpeg

(B) Example of Defendant/Respondent exhibits:

A_Photo_of_childs_bedroom_Jpeg

B_Letter_from_Mother_to_Father_pdf

C_Parties_2016_US_Income_Tax_Return_pdf

(d) Redaction

The Clerk of the Court will not remove or redact any electronic evidence containing personally identifiable information, confidential information, or proprietary information. The filer submitting electronic evidence is responsible for redaction of such, information, or limiting access to such information.

(e) Equipment

The Court provides audio-video presentation equipment in each courtroom. Any additional equipment required to view and/or listen to electronic evidence is the responsibility of party offering the evidence.

(f) Failure to Submit Evidence in Compliance with EEP

If a party fails to submit evidence in compliance with EEP, upon request of any other party, the Court may:

- (1) Prohibit the non-complying party from using the evidence at the hearing, trial, or motion docket unless the failure was substantially justified or is harmless.
- (2) On motion and after opportunity to be heard, order payment of the reasonable expenses, including attorney's fees; caused by the failure, and impose other appropriate sanctions.

PART 17 – EFFECTIVE DATE

These rules shall become effective on the 9 day of August, 2023.

ADOPTION OF ELECTRONIC FILING RULES

The foregoing Rutherford County Circuit Civil Court E-Filing Rules concerning the electronic filing of documents are hereby adopted by the Presiding Judge on this the 7 day of July, 2023 and submitted to the Administrative Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts.



Darrell Scarlett, Circuit Court Judge
Presiding Judge 16th Judicial District