Supreme Court of Florida

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Supreme Court Puts Standard Civil Jury Instructions On-Line

TALLAHASSEE – A legal research tool long sought by Florida attorneys and judges – Florida’s complete standard jury instructions for civil cases – has been added to the Florida Supreme Court’s website, finalizing years of work to make all standard jury instructions easily available for free and in an up-to-date form.

The civil jury instructions, together with criminal jury instructions added in 2005, are linked from the main page of www.floridasupremecourt.org. Follow the “Standard Jury Instructions” link.

“This completes a lengthy project that will greatly benefit everyone involved in civil trials in Florida,” said Chief Justice Peggy A. Quince. “Until the instructions were placed on our website, it often was difficult to find the most recent versions even though these model instructions are used every day in our civil courts. This addition to our website will help avoid costly mistakes at trial while also reducing the costs arising from legal research.”

Placing the civil instructions on-line was a joint project of the Florida Bar’s committee on standard civil jury instructions and the Florida Supreme Court’s public information office under the direction of the Court.

All instructions are now available in a form that easily can be cut and pasted into a final version during the often intense negotiations among lawyers at the end of a civil trial. Standard jury instructions are almost never used verbatim; they must be customized in each case. But the standard instruction are the starting point for these negotiations and help ensure that the lawyers and judges do not overlook important issues.
Because they are on the World-Wide Web in electronic format, the instructions now can be updated instantly for everyone to use. Previously, attorneys and judges had to await periodic paper publications that often were out-of-date by the time they were first used. And this meant that everyone would have to scour Florida Supreme Court opinions to see if any of the instructions had been changed.

Public input to the Bar committee on standard civil jury instructions also will now be easier. The new civil jury instruction website contains a link through which attorneys or anyone else can directly comment to committee members with suggestions or comments for revisions. Committee proposals for changes to the civil instructions also will be placed on the website, in addition to the traditional publication in the Florida Bar News.

The addition of this new research tool continues a long tradition at the Florida Supreme Court of using the Internet to provide free, cost-saving research information directly to the public, which began with a website it first placed on-line in 1994 when the World-Wide Web was still in its infancy. This pioneering effort by the Florida Supreme Court now has become standard practice in courts world-wide.

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