



Supreme Court of Florida

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For Immediate Release

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Supreme Court Puts Criminal Jury Instructions On-Line

TALLAHASSEE -- Most people seldom think about them until they face a jury on criminal charges. Defense lawyers and judges obsess over them. They are a part of every criminal jury trial. But until now, they were among the least accessible and most demanded legal research materials in Florida.

No more. The state's Standard Criminal Jury Instructions now are on-line, linked from the front page of Florida Supreme Court website at www.floridasupremecourt.org.

"This year-long project fulfills a major goal of mine," said Florida's Chief Justice Barbara J. Pariente. "Our clerk and public information offices receive hundreds of calls and E-mails each year begging us to put the criminal jury instructions on-line. Well, now we've done it."

The instructions are 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 criminal trial. Standard jury instructions are never used verbatim; they must be customized in each case.

Being 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 yearly paper publications and also peruse court decisions to see if any changes had been made that they might

have to use. Mistakes were all too easy to make, sometimes resulting in the need for a new trial.

Lester Garringer, a senior attorney in the Office of the State Courts Administrator and former prosecutor, handled the legal editing of the instructions and explained their significance.

"Providing the instructions on-line guarantees that the ones used by the court in criminal cases are up to date," he said. "No longer will a person have to wait for a yearly supplement in order to have a complete set of instructions. The on-line format gives every attorney the opportunity to quickly and easily prepare a customized set of instructions for use at every criminal trial."

The on-line instructions replace a paper book that totaled more than 800 pages and that, in many law libraries, may not always have been kept up-to-date. It often was hard to tell exactly when any particular copy had been updated. The time consumed in research could be lengthy and expensive when attorney's fees or salaries are considered.

Putting the instructions on-line also presented significant challenges to the Court's web programmers. Alan Neubauer of the Information Systems Services office handled primary programming for the collection, and final web design and programming was handled by Web Administrator Tricia Knox in the Court's Public Information Office.

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