

The Philadelphia Courts

First Judicial District of Pennsylvania

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FJD Partners with Yondr™ to Implement New Cellphone and Audio Device Restrictions at Stout Criminal Justice Center

PHILADELPHIA, PA – In an effort to deter, if not eliminate, intimidation of witnesses and courtroom disruptions, the First Judicial District - Courts of Philadelphia, has partnered with Yondr™, a company specializing in creating phone-free spaces, to implement new cellphone and recording device restrictions at the Juanita Kidd Stout Center for Criminal Justice beginning Monday - April 3, 2017.

“The proliferation of mobile devices throughout society has given rise to safety and security concerns in our courtrooms. In order to balance the public’s desire to keep their devices in-hand with the Court’s duty to ensure a safe courtroom environment without disruption, the FJD has teamed up with Yondr™ to address a 21st century problem with a 21st century solution,” said Administrative Judge of the Court of Common Pleas – Trial Division, Jacqueline F. Allen.

Under the new mobile device restrictions, all entrants to the Stout Center will be required to turn off their devices and place them in a Yondr™ form-fitting lockable pouch. Members of the public will keep their pouch-covered device with them, but will be unable to access it for purposes of taking photos or videos, sending text messages, or placing/receiving phone calls.

Prior to exiting the courthouse, the pouch will be unlocked by a simple magnetic disk mechanism. The distribution and collection of the Yondr™ pouches will be handled by the sheriff’s office, which handles all courthouse security.

The restrictions would apply to all mobile computing and telecommunication devices including, but not limited to, cellular telephones, smart phones, and other devices capable of connecting to the internet or making audio or video recordings. The use of such devices will not be permitted inside the building and violators of the new protocol could face prosecution for contempt of court.

“The new Yondr™ pouch provides a solution to issues that other jurisdictions around the country are facing as well,” said Municipal Court President Judge, Marsha H. Neifield. “The new pouch is a functional, simple solution that eliminates the need to collect and store phones of all those entering the courthouse.”

While the new restrictions will affect the majority of those who enter the Stout Center, the following individuals will be exempt:

- Current or former Judges and current employees of the First Judicial District;
- Federal, state, or municipal law enforcement or probation and parole officers who display his or her proper credentials upon request;
- Any attorney displaying a bar card or the employee of an attorney entering the courthouse for the purpose of conducting court or an official hearing, and who displays his or her proper credentials upon request;
- An individual who displays a current jury summons or who is entering in response to such summons;
- An official of a governmental agency entering the courthouse for the purpose of conducting court, an official hearing or court duties and who displays his or her proper credentials upon request;

- Persons with disabilities, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, that require them to have electronic devices to communicate;
- Any person displaying written permission to bring such device into the courthouse issued by a resident Judge holding court in the Justice Juanita Kidd Stout Center for Criminal Justice;
- Members of the news media with current proper valid identification and credentials;
- Justice Juanita Kidd Stout Center for Criminal Justice building and maintenance workers; and
- Case managers, treatment providers, victim witness coordinators, veterans' justice outreach coordinators (VJO), veterans' mentors, and forensic peer specialists, with proper identification.

"This new safety and security measure has received broad support from our justice partners, who see the Yondr™ pouch as a practical solution to eliminating some of the potential drawbacks of having mobile devices in our courtrooms," said Court of Common Pleas President Judge, Sheila Woods-Skipper.

"While we realize there may be some concerns about the new restrictions, we believe we have found a realistic way to increase safety in our courthouse without placing too much of a burden on the people we serve," she said.

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