

First Judicial District of Pennsylvania

Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County

Orphans' Court Division



**ORPHANS' COURT
ELECTRONIC FILING SYSTEM**

**Electronic Filing in the Orphans' Court Division:
*"A Five Year Report"***

**Honorable Joseph D. O'Keefe
Administrative Judge
Orphans' Court Division**

**Honorable Ronald R. Donatucci
Clerk of the Orphans' Court
Division, Philadelphia County**

January 2010

Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County

Orphans' Court Division

Electronic Filing in the Orphans' Court Division

On January 1, 2005, the Philadelphia Orphans' Court Division implemented the *Orphans' Court Electronic Filing System* ("OCEFS"), which permits the electronic filing of all legal papers and pleadings through the internet. OCEFS is accessible through the website of the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, at <http://courts.phila.gov>. During the first six months, Electronic Filing was *discretionary*, i.e. counsel and *pro se* parties had the option to file pleadings either in a paper format or electronically. Beginning July 1, 2005, Electronic Filing became mandatory. All pleadings must now be filed electronically.

The following Report highlights important requirements of the *Orphans' Court Electronic Filing System*, provides a summary of the *Orphans' Court Electronic Filing System's* core functionality, and analyzes the filing trends in the Orphans' Court for the sixty-month period beginning on January 1, 2005 and ending December 31, 2009.

Lawyers and *pro se* parties alike can electronically apply for a User Name, Password and PIN to access OCEFS through the Court's website (<http://courts.phila.gov>). The User Name, Password and PIN will be emailed immediately upon submission to the email address provided by the registered user.

All registered users are able to log on the Orphans' Court site, utilizing the User Name, Password and PIN supplied to them, and will be able to commence a new Orphans' Court case, file a pleading in an existing Orphans' Court case, or review the dockets of the particular case. Additionally, attorneys may review all dockets and associated documents of any case in which their entry of appearance has been officially filed. *Pro se* parties may similarly view any electronically filed or scanned pleading stored in OCEFS in their case. Indeed, **all** documents filed since January 1, 2005 are available to *pro se* parties and counsel in an electronic format – regardless of whether the pleadings were filed in an electronic or paper format.

To date, a total of 15,988 User Names and passwords have been issued: 10,585 to attorneys and 5,403 to *pro se* parties. Of the 10,585 attorneys who have registered, 1,544 (or 15%) have electronically filed at least one pleading. Conversely, only 171 of the 5,403 registered *pro se* parties (or 3.2%) have filed an electronic pleading.

In order to maintain the integrity, pagination and formatting of pleadings, OCEFS requires the submission of pleadings in a portable document format ("*pdf*"). Filing parties must convert the electronic document (most likely prepared in a word processing application such as *Word* or *WordPerfect*) and all exhibits (most likely paper documents such as wills, tax returns, medical reports and the like) to a *portable document format*. The conversion may be accomplished by utilizing programs such as *Adobe Acrobat*, *pdf995* or *WordPerfect*, and by scanning paper documents and converting them to a *pdf* format. The *Orphans' Court Electronic Filing System* facilitates the filing of paper pleadings and exhibits and conversion to *portable document format*: during the electronic filing process, filing parties fax their paper documents to specified telephone numbers and, upon receipts, the Court's Fax Server automatically converts them to a *pdf* format. Please consult the OCEFS' *User Manual* for specific information concerning the Fax-Server functionality.

The Clerk is statutorily prohibited from accepting a document for filing unless the requisite fee is paid, and the Electronic Filing System provides the filing party several choices for the payment of the applicable filing fees: electronically by credit card, by mail with a check, and in-person in the Clerk's office by cash, check or credit card -but electronic payment by credit card is preferred and will result in the most expeditious review of the pleading by the Clerk's office.

Counsel and *pro se* parties may access documents filed in their cases through the Internet; however, remote public access of electronic pleadings is not available. Public access of all electronically filed pleadings is available through computer terminals located in the Clerk's office. As required by local rule, the following data fields are redacted by the Clerk from electronically filed documents: (a) the name of the minor (in the case of a minor's estate), (b) Social Security numbers, (c) dates of birth, (d) financial account numbers, and (e) home addresses.

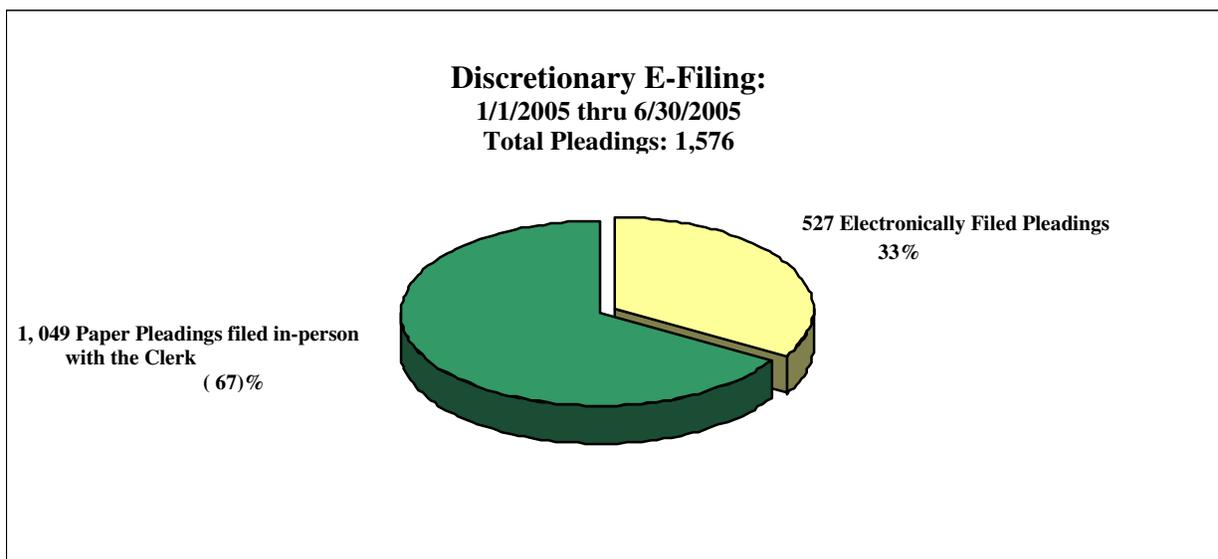
Hands-on training Sessions is available – and a Training Video is available on-line: click the *Orphans' Court E-Filing* link at the Court's website, <http://courts.phila.gov>. A **User Log On** screen will be displayed. A link to the *Electronic Filing Tutorial* is located at the bottom right of the User Log On screen.

Detailed information concerning the *Orphans' Court Electronic Filing System* can be found in the *User Manual*, which is available through the **User Log On** screen referenced above.

Statistical Summary

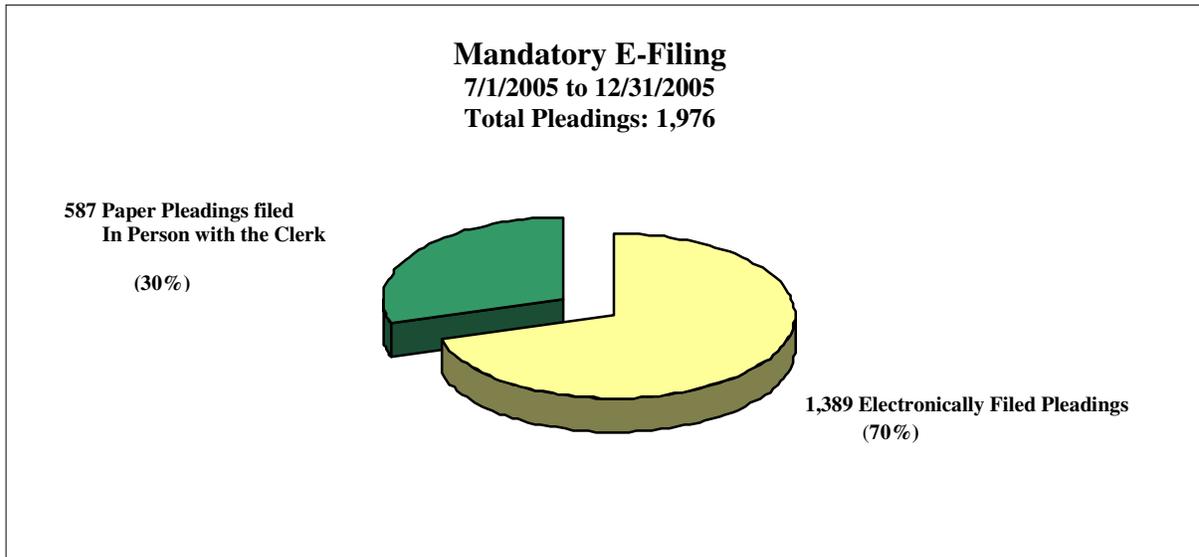
A. January 1, 2005 to June 30, 2005. The First Six-Month Period: Discretionary E- Filing

From January 1, 2005 to June 30, 2005, when Electronic Filing was discretionary, a total of 1,576 Orphans' Court pleadings were filed. Of these, 1,049, or 67%, were filed in a paper format and 527, or 33%, were filed electronically.



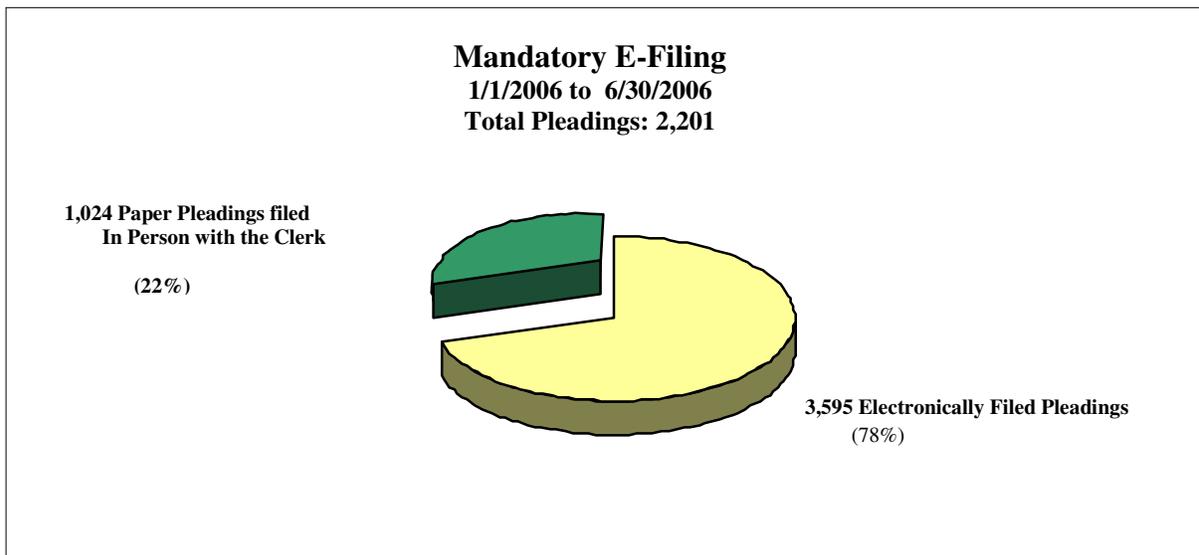
***B. July 1, 2005 to December 31, 2005. The Second Six-Month Period:
Mandatory E-Filing Begins***

From July 1, 2005, when Electronic Filing became mandatory, to December 31, 2005, a total of 1976 Orphans' Court pleadings were filed. Of these, 587, or 30%, were filed in a paper format and 1,389, or 70%, were filed electronically.



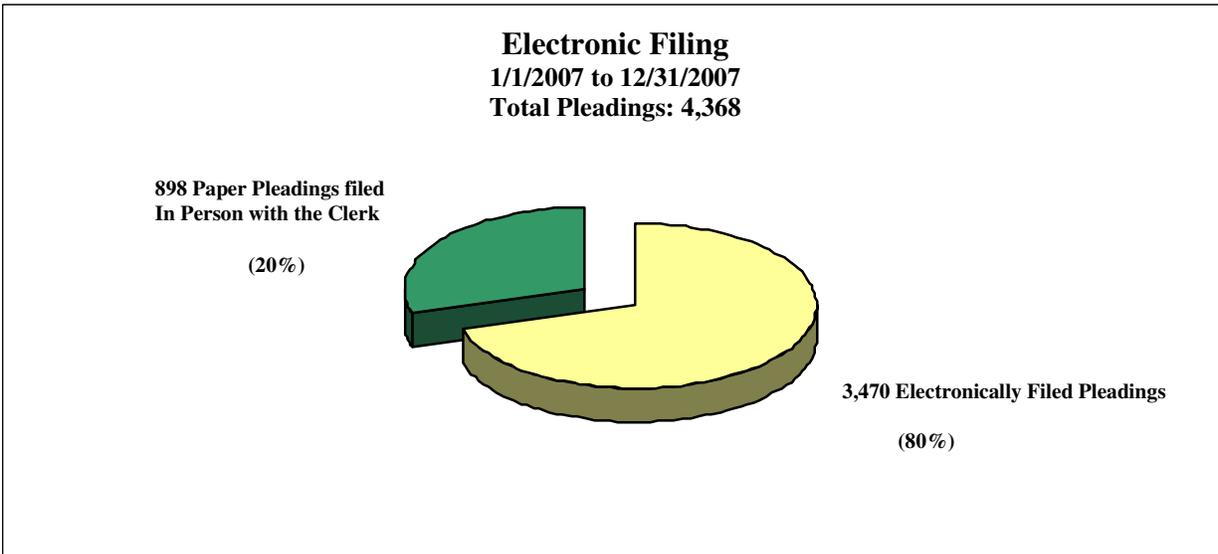
C. January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006. The Second Year: Electronic Filing Continues

From January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006 a total of 4,619 Orphans' Court pleadings were filed. Of these, 1,024, or 22%, were filed in a paper format and 3,595, or 78%, were filed electronically.



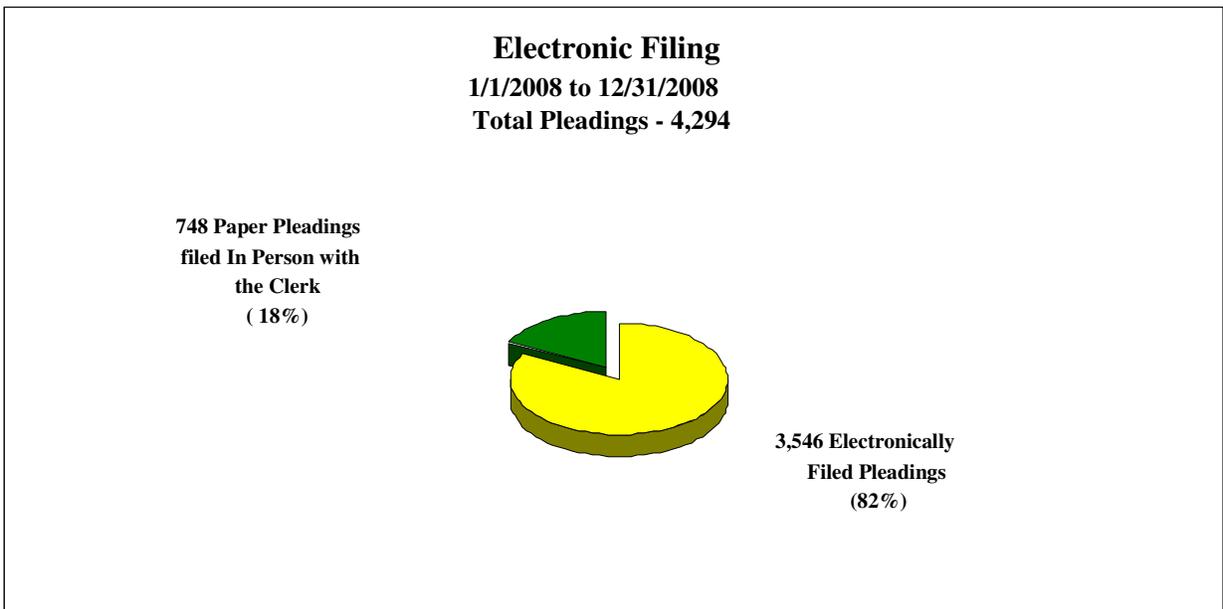
D. January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007 - The Third Year

Between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2007, approximately 4,368 Orphans' Court pleadings were filed. Of these, 898, or 20% were filed in a paper format and 3,470, or 80%, were filed electronically.



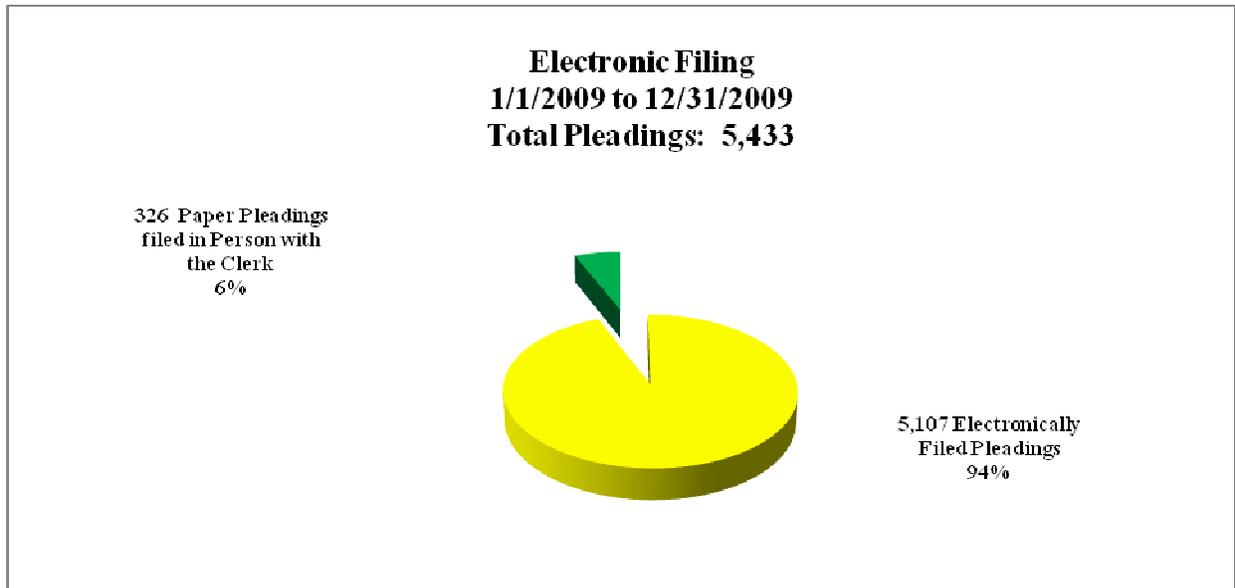
E. January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008: The Fourth Year

Between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2008, approximately 4,294 Orphans' Court pleadings were filed. Of these 748 (18% of all pleadings filed) were filed in a paper format and 3,546 (82% of all pleadings filed) were filed electronically.



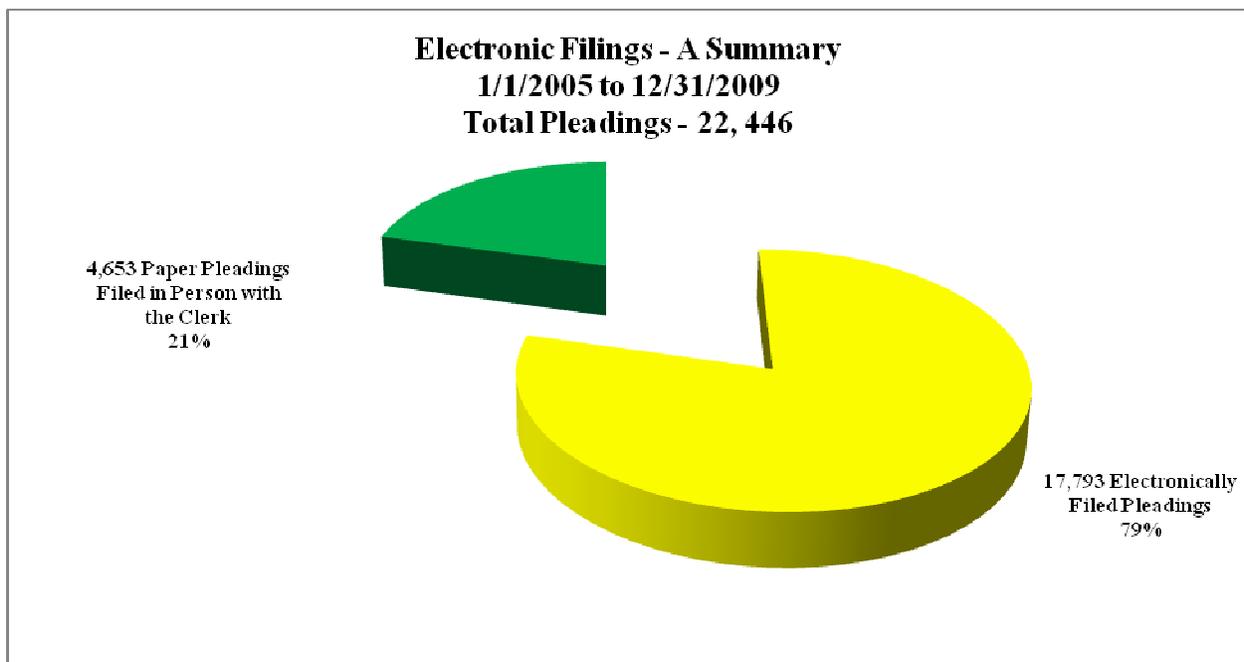
F. January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009: The Fifth Year

Between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2009 approximately 5,433 Orphans' Court pleadings were filed. Of these 326, or 6%, were filed in a paper format and 5,107, or 94%, were filed electronically.



G. January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2009: Five-Year History

Between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2009, approximately 22,446 Orphans Court pleadings were filed. Of these, 4,653, or 21%, were filed in a paper format and 17,793, or 79%, were filed electronically.



Clerk of Orphans' Court Review Process and Help Desk

The staff of the Clerk of the Orphans' Court is responsible for processing all electronic submissions. The Clerk's staff must review all filed pleadings to determine whether they comply, as to form, with rules of court. Electronic pleadings are rejected if they are not in compliance with rules of court (the reason for the rejection is specified by the Clerk), or accepted if they do comply with rules of court and the applicable filing fees are paid. The Clerk's staff continues to process pleadings filed in person or through the mail – as well as payments made in person or through the mail.

The Clerk review process includes not only scanning paper documents which are submitted in a paper format by the filing party, but also scanning notices and orders issued by the Court as well as redacting certain data elements from electronically filed pleadings, as required by Orphans' Court Local Rule 3.7.A.(4).

The Orphans' Court Electronic Filing System currently contains 85,888 electronic **documents** of which 23,263 were electronically filed, 985 scanned by the Clerk's office, and 640 documents which have been redacted by the Clerk's Office.

The average time lapse between the time a pleading is electronically submitted and approved or rejected by the Clerk is carefully monitored by the Court to insure that all pleadings filed electronically are processed in a timely manner. Available data reveals that the Clerk's office consistently reviews pleadings on a timely basis.

During the entire electronic filing history (from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2009), the average review time for pleadings filed during Court hours was 20 minutes; and the average review time for pleadings filed after regular Court hours averaged 57 hours. This latter average includes all delays after the filing, including overnight, holiday and week-end delays, as well as delays occasioned by the in-person or mail payment of the filing fees.

All Help Desk questions are sent to a central email (ocsupport@courts.phila.gov) and answered by Clerk staff (with input from the Court's technical staff if technical issues are raised).

The achievements identified above would not have been possible without the hard work and cooperation of the Clerk's Office, the Orphans' Court Judicial staff and the Orphans' Court Bar.

We thank you all for your continued cooperation and assistance.

Honorable Joseph D. O'Keefe
Administrative Judge
Orphans' Court Division

Honorable Ronald R. Donatucci
Clerk of the Orphans' Court
Division, Philadelphia County

January 2010