

Top court eases camera rule

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The Michigan Supreme Court will liberalize its cameras-in-the-courtroom rule in Oakland and four other counties.

The change, effective June 20, follows media complaints that the experimental rule gave defendants, lawyers and witnesses too much arbitrary power to shut down TV cameras, press cameras and tape recorders. Nearly half of requests to Oak-

land Circuit Court for photographic-electronic coverage were denied.

The new experimental rule says the judge must determine — on the record — that such coverage would hurt the effort to have a fair trial or hearing.

IN WAYNE and 78 other counties, the old experimental rule will still apply. Any party or witness may demand that the judge deny the request for photographic or electronic coverage.

In Oakland Circuit Court, 73 requests for photographic-electronic coverage were filed since the experimental order went into effect Oct. 15, according to Judy Cunningham, acting administrator. Of these, 29 were denied and 44 approved.

Subtracting the October filings — many of which were for feature stories on the experiment rather than for trial coverage — there were 53 requests, 23 denials and 30 approvals — a 43 percent rejection rate.

Experimental counties besides Oakland are Grand Traverse, Ingham, Marquette and Westford. Only Oakland is in a major television market and had any great number of requests.

THE NEW order was recommended by a panel chaired by Judge Joseph B. Sullivan of the state Court of Appeals.

He said that requests have been "almost universally denied" across the state, making it impossible to gauge the effect, if any, of such coverage and whether it should be allowed on a permanent basis.

Under the new order, judges in the five counties must make a report each month to the state court administrator on how many requests they receive and what happened to them.

A judge's decision to end, suspend or ban coverage can't be appealed.

The rule continues to ban photographing jurors and the jury selection process.

Requests for photo and electronic coverage must be made in writing three days prior to the event, but a judge may honor a request that comes in later.

No school tax plan on ballot

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Don't expect a school tax-reform proposal on the Aug. 2 ballot.

The state Senate declined Thursday to take up a House proposal passed Wednesday to place a sales tax increase/property tax cut before voters. Deadline for Senate action was Friday.

"The whole debate was on suspension of the rules," said Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills. "Democrats moved to have the rules suspended so we could take it up under messages from the House. Republicans were against that."

"So it's on the calendar for next week. But it's no longer possible to put it on the August ballot," Faxon said.

Senate Republicans were miffed that the House waited until one working day before the deadline to pass their version of a complicated proposal that includes amending

several sections of the state constitution and passing a long list of laws.

THE MONEY was that the Senate acted first, in mid-March. It passed Senate Joint Resolution K proposing a sales tax increase and property tax cut.

The measure returned by the House Wednesday was its 15th substitute for SJR K.

It called for raising the sales tax to 8 percent from 4, cutting school operating property taxes by 8 mills, and raising total revenues by \$500 million.

Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, was pleased that the Senate set aside action.

"We had a holiday Monday (Memorial Day). I got a copy of the House plan Tuesday and was up until 2 in the morning reading and trying to understand it," she said.

LIKE MANY lawmakers from districts with high business tax bases, Bankes saw no advantage and only harm to her home school district.

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