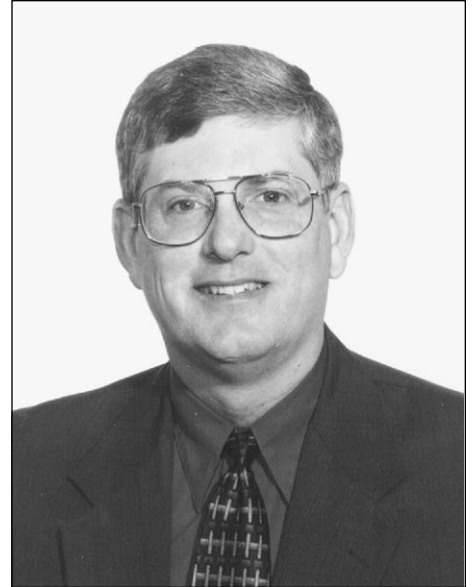


New Security Measures Will Affect Access

by *Kevin M. Oeffner*
Circuit Court Administrator



Oakland County is about to roll out new security measures in the courthouse and its adjacent facilities that will impact the manner in which attorneys can access judges and their employees. The security enhancements will limit and control public access to chambers and judicial staff offices. Attorneys will need to be informed of the upcoming changes, as direct and unimpeded access to the “private” hallways in the courthouse will become a thing of the past.

A couple of years ago Oakland County distributed requests for proposal to several courthouse security consultants nationwide. Kroll Security out of Chicago was awarded the contract to design security enhancements for the courthouse tower and adjacent facilities. Comsat Security, a local security vendor, was awarded a contract to install the security measures. The timetable for implementing the security upgrades is May/June of this year.

You might say that the plan provides for a three-pronged approach to heightened security. Turnstiles will be installed in each of the three public entrances – the north and south lobbies in the courthouse tower and the entrance in the west wing extension (the building in which the law library is located). County and court employees who enter the building in any of the three public entrances will be required to go through the turnstiles, which will be equipped with a card reader. Employees must insert their ID cards into the reader, which will release the turnstiles and enable the employees to move through.

However, employees may not be required to go through security to gain entry into the courthouse. Employees who choose to enter at any of the three public entrances will be required to use the turnstiles, but there will continue to be several other locations in which employees may enter. These entrances are locked and accessible only by card access reader, and will be monitored by video surveillance cameras.

The second phase will see the installation of nearly 150 closed-circuit video cameras inside the courthouse and in the surrounding parking lots. The cameras will provide a feed to a large bank of monitors that will be viewed seven days a week, 24 hours a day. In addition to providing security personnel with a 24/7 visual of all public areas, the cameras will be recording-capable so that records can be maintained and available to the appropriate authorities should an incident occur.

The last phase – undoubtedly of most interest to attorneys – involves changes in access to the judges and their clerks, secretaries and court reporters. Lawyers, litigants and the public who want to meet with a judge or his or her staff currently gain access to the private hallways through one of the doors located at each end of the hallways or through the courtroom. The security plan calls for every door that gains access to the private hallways to be locked, with controlled access only. This was deemed particularly important given that defendants in custody are routinely transported by sheriff’s deputies through the private hallways.

A card access reader will be placed on the exterior of every door leading to the private hallways – which includes the doors at the ends of each hallway and the doors inside the courtrooms. Employees who have been so authorized will be able to gain access through the doors by swiping their ID cards through the card readers. All others must gain access with the approval of the judge and/or judicial employee with whom they want to meet.

You will need to be granted access as follows: In addition to the card access readers installed on the exterior side of the doors at the end of the private hallways, video cameras, intercoms and buzzers will also be installed. The buzzers will be buttons – like doorbells – installed in groups of three, with each denoting the judge to whose chambers the buzzer is connected. Someone wanting to see

a particular judge would press the corresponding buzzer. A monitor and intercom will be placed with that judge's secretary or clerk. The applicable judicial employee will answer the buzzer and talk, via intercom, to the person wanting access. The judicial employee will also have the benefit of a video monitor to see the person wanting access. The judicial employee will be able to push a button in chambers to temporarily unlock the private hallway door, through which the person may enter.

Access to chambers through the courtroom will be handled a little differently. There are two doors in each courtroom leading to chambers – one through which the judge walks when leaving the bench, the other for use by everyone else. Card access readers will be installed at both doors on the courtroom side of the doors. Just as with the hallway door card access readers, judges and employees will be able to unlock the courtroom doors by swiping their cards through the readers. Everyone else will need to be granted

access before they can move from the courtroom to chambers.

The clerk will have a button at his or her work station inside the courtroom that he or she can press to temporarily unlock the door to enable lawyers, jurors, litigants, media, the public and all others to gain entry into the private hallways.

That is the upcoming security enhancement program in a nutshell. I know that the program may cause some confusion and disruption at first, and probably won't be viewed all that favorably. Please bear in mind that the principle of controlled access has been demonstrated in other courts to be an effective security staple in their arsenal of security measures. It is unfortunate that Oakland County has had to go to this extent, but in this day and age when violence is so prevalent in society – even in our courthouses where emotions are running high – these measures are necessary to provide jurors, deputies, judges, judicial employees and others with a safe and secure environment in which to conduct their business and public service.

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