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## **KING COUNTY ELECTRONIC COURT RECORDS HONORED AS INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AWARD WINNER**

### ***Harvard University's Ash Institute Recognizes Work Facilitating Access to Court Records***

**Cambridge, Mass., – September 25, 2007** – The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government today announced King County's Electronic Court Records (ECR) Program as a 2007 Innovations in American Government Award winner. The ECR Program of King County, Washington was one of seven \$100,000 award winners announced at yesterday's Innovations in American Government Awards twentieth anniversary reception in Washington, D.C. Recognized as a more efficient, cost-effective solution for addressing the cumbersome paper-based court record storage and retrieval process, King County's ECR Program will receive \$100,000 to share its practices across the nation.

As the thirteenth most populous county in the country, the King County Superior Court Clerk's office receives 8,000 daily filings for both criminal and civil cases through the work of thousands of attorneys, litigants, and more than 60 judicial officers. With court records only accessible at the Clerk's office during business hours and with only one person able to view a case file at a time, retrieving records could take days. Often judges had to make decisions without all relevant information in hand.

Encouraged by a 1998 statutory change, King County's Department of Judicial Administration was able to designate the electronic document as the official case record. In 2000, the ECR Program kicked off a phased roll out of projects including conversion of all paper-based records into electronic versions, implementation of electronic filing and enabling online public access. Thanks to

the dramatic improvements in operational efficiencies, the program reports over \$5 million in savings. Benefits include:

- **Ease of Access:** Judges, clerks, attorneys, court commissioners and sheriffs can instantaneously access or file electronic court records at any time without going to the Clerk's office. Judges review court records electronically while on the bench.
- **Multiple Users:** Unlike the previous paper-based process, multiple parties can access court records simultaneously, eliminating frustrations over checked-out or missing files.
- **Security:** Issues of document defacement and lost or stolen files are no longer a problem under the program's electronic document platform. The system's rule-based credentialing ensures only authorized users have access to sealed court records. In the event of a system crash, ECR's built in back up platform prevents data loss.

"We are incredibly grateful to be recognized as a 2007 Innovations in American Government Award winner," said Barbara Miner, director of the King County Department of Judicial Administration and superior court clerk. "As a result of the efficiencies put in place by the ECR Program, our judges have dramatically improved access to court case record information to support more informed judicial decision-making. Thanks to the ECR system, we are more efficient and we are able to serve the court, litigants and the public better than before."

"The King County Electronic Court Records Program demonstrates the power of collaboration to fundamentally improve the judicial process," said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. "The King County Clerk's office worked hand-in-hand with multiple parties to replace the paper-based process and enhance justice. It is our hope that as a 2007 Innovations in American Government Award winner, King County will share its practices with other judicial departments around the country."

Established in 1986 at Harvard University by the Ford Foundation, the Innovations in American Government Award Program has honored 174 federal, state and local government agencies. Through this annual competition, the Program provides concrete evidence that government can work to improve the quality of life of citizens. Many award-winning programs have been replicated across jurisdictions and policy areas, and some have served as harbingers of today's reform strategies or as forerunners to state and federal legislation. By highlighting exemplary models of government's innovative programs over the past 20 years, the Program drives continued progress

and encourages research and teaching cases at Harvard University and other academic institutions worldwide.

**About The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation**

The Roy and Lila Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, publications, leadership training, global network and awards program – developed in collaboration with a diverse, engaged community of scholars and practitioners - the Ash Institute fosters creative and effective government problem-solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. The Ford Foundation is a founding donor of the institute. Additional information about The Ash Institute is available at [www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu](http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu). Organizations are encouraged to apply to the 2008 Innovations in American Government Awards by October 15, 2007 at [www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu](http://www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu).

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