Electronic Filing Standards:
A Quick Start

King County Superior Court Clerk's Conference:

Establishing Your Own Electronic Court Record System

August 6, 2009

Mr. James E. Cabral Jr.

MTG Management Consultants, LLC, Senior Manager

OASIS LegalXML Electronic Court Filing Technical Committee, Member

Overview

- Electronic Court Filing (ECF)

- 7 Steps to Electronic Filing (E-Filing)

- Case Studies

ECF

Why do I need to know about ECF *technical* standards?

- As state and local courts prepare for e-filing, they must pay attention to what all other courts are doing because …
    - A system is required to cover technical actions and information-exchanges to accomplish all necessary tasks for e-filing.

- If each court or vendor designed e-filing in its own way …
    - Those who e-file in one court would have difficulty e-filing in a second court that does e-filing differently.
    - No one could comply with the technical requirements of many fundamentally different e-filing systems.
    - Litigants would choose *not* to e-file, and e-filing systems would fail!

- There must be *technical standards* on which all e-filing systems are based if e-filing is to succeed in state and local courts.

What does use of technical standards in our ECF systems get us?

- "Interoperability."
  - E-filing systems become interoperable by complying with the same technical standards.
  - Even though each court and each firm or individual will have separately developed e-filing applications, use different operating systems, and run "incompatible" computer systems, e-filing messages can be transmitted, understood, and accepted …
    - Between one attorney or filer and another.
    - Between a filer and a given court.
    - Between a filer and other courts.
    - Between different courts.
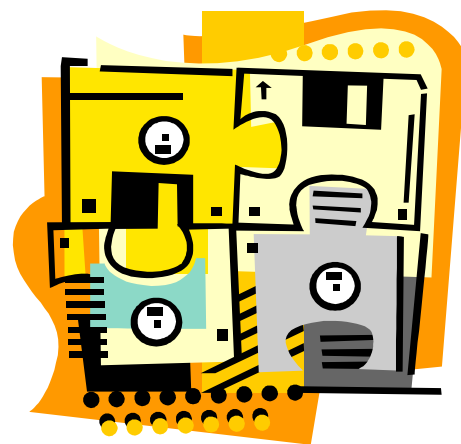
What *technical* things need standardizing?

- E-filing involves eXtensible Markup Language technology (XML).

  - XML is both powerful and complex.

  - It has strict rules and practices that must be exact.

  - Different systems must use the same data tags and terms in order to be compatible at the technical level.

- E-filing requires a common filing "architecture."

  - Different systems need the same basic design elements to perform necessary e-filing functions.

  - The "messages" necessary for e-filing transactions must be built in the same ways.

What about e-filing business practices?

- If each e-filing system is designed locally, thus being quite different from others …
  - Users would need to master many different business rules and practices.

- A proposed standard for e-filing business and process practices was adopted for courts in 2003.
  - *http://ncsconline.org/D_Tech/standards/#efp.*
  - This document has a very good introduction to the basic concepts of e-filing (approximately the first 50 pages).

7 Steps to E-Filing

7 Steps to E-Filing

- Step 1 – Identify E-Filing Service Provider(s)
- Step 2 – Identify an E-Filing Manager (EFM)
- Step 3 – Choose to Implement ECF 4.0
- Step 4 – Develop Your Court Policy
- Step 5 – Understand MDEs, Operations, and Messages
- Step 6 – Choose a Service Interaction Profile
- Step 7 – Develop and Implement

Step 1– Identify an E-Filing Service Provider(s)

- The primary system utilized to prepare and submit court filings electronically.

- You need to identify at *least* one filing service provider.

- You are *not* restricted to a specific filing service provider.

- The filing service provider provides the filing assembly major design element (MDE).

Step 1– Identify an E-Filing Service Provider(s)

- **Filing service provider options:**
  - **E-filing vendor.**
    - Several commercial e-filing systems are available.
    - One or more could be selected for your implementation.
  - **In-house.**
    - Many courts have developed their own e-filing systems that include a filing service provider.
  - **System customization.**
    - Software could be customized to automatically submit documents for filing (e.g., document generation software).

Step 2 – Identify an EFM

- Applications that:
  - Receive and review electronic filings submitted by the filing service providers.
  - Submit accepted filings to the court record system (case/document management systems).

- You must have at *least* one EFM.

- The EFM provides the filing review MDE.

Step 2 – Identify an EFM

- EFM options:
  - Same as filing service provider.
    - Integrated with filing generation.
  - Same as case management system.
    - Integrated with the court record.
  - Stand-alone solutions.
    - Several commercial EFM systems are available.
    - Court could develop its own EFM.

Step 3 – Choose to Implement ECF 4.0

■ Integration standards are required for e-filing.

- Scenario 1:
    - Vendor provides the filing service provider and EFM.
    - Court hosts its own case/document management systems.
- Scenario 2:
    - Vendor provides the filing service provider.
    - Court hosts the EFM within the case management system.
- Scenario 3:
    - A court develops its own filing service provider and EFM separate from the case/document management systems.
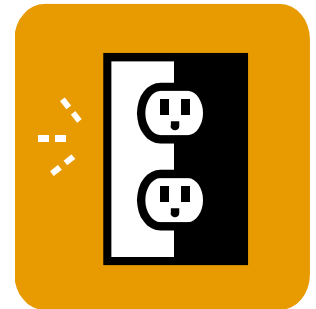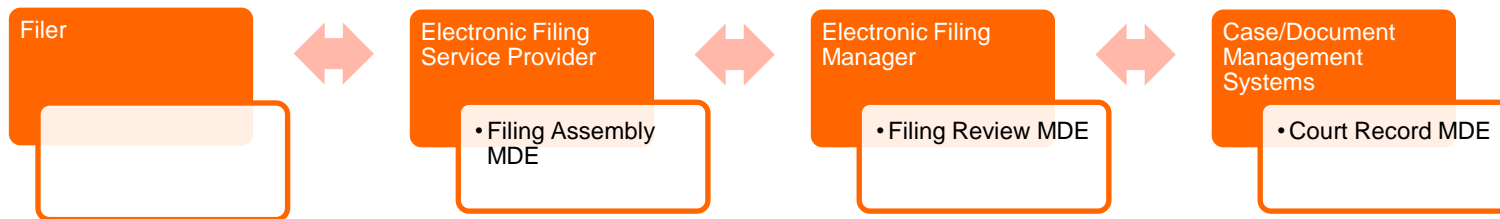
Step 3 – Choose To Implement ECF 4.0

- Benefits of Adopting ECF 4.0

  - Leverage "best in class" concepts.

  - Ensure interoperability with other e-filing systems.

  - Find support for development using a scalable approach.

  - Contribute to the ongoing improvement of the standard.

Step 4 – Develop Your Court Policy

- Customizes the ECF implementation for particular court(s).

- Court policy defines:

  - Types of cases/documents that may be filed.

  - Required information not defined in ECF.

  - Code lists.

Step 5 – Understand MDEs, Operations and Messages

Filer		Electronic Filing Service Provider		Electronic Filing Manager		Case/Document Management Systems
		• Filing Assembly MDE		• Filing Review MDE		• Court Record MDE

- E-filed information, documents, and requests move through an electronic service provider and EFM to the case/ document management systems.

- Filing status information (e.g., whether the e-filing was successful or failed) and responses flow back to the filer.

- The real savings that relieve court workloads come from integrating the e-filing system with the court's case and document management systems.
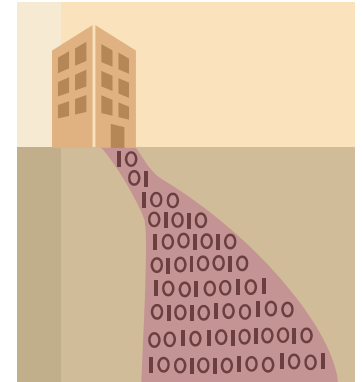
Step 6 – Choose a Service Interaction Profile
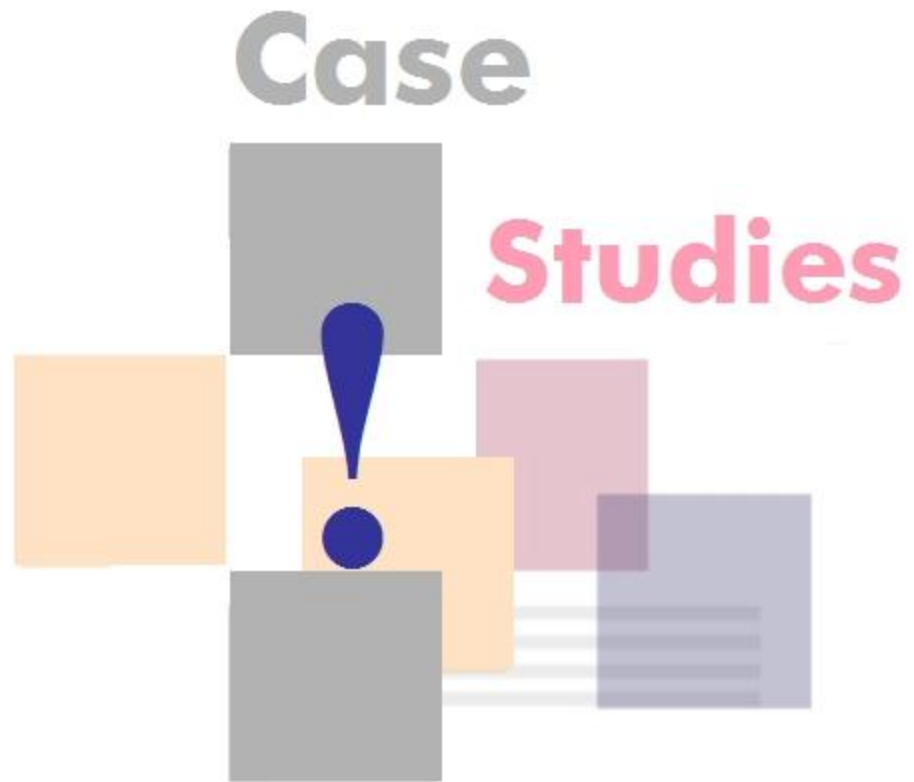
- A method by which the components will communicate and exchange messages.

- Service interaction profile options:
  - Web services.
  - Portable media.
  - Custom.

Step 7 – Develop and Implement

- Implement MDEs and operations.
    - Get policy.
    - Review filing.
    - Record filing.
    - Notify docketing complete.
    - Notify filing review complete.

Case Studies

ECF Case Study 1:
Superior Court of Arizona
in Maricopa County

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County

- Complex litigation e-filing pilot (2003).
  - Complex civil litigation pilot project.
  - Contracted vendor LexisNexis File & Serve.
  - Mandatory e-filing for complex cases.
  - Attorneys use vendor system to e-file, clerk staff use vendor system to review filings, and judges and judicial staff use vendor system to review and rule on filings.

- Lessons learned.
  - Services that vendors offer the legal community are essential.
  - 24/7 telephone and e-mail support offered by vendors is essential.
  - The court discovered it did not want to force our customers to use a prescribed e-filing system.
  - The court wanted more flexibility to manage and improve the functionality of Clerk Review and Judge Review, to more tightly integrate them with case and document management systems.

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County

- Integration based on ECF:
  - Maricopa County Attorney's Office (subsequent filings).
  - Sheriff's Office (Quashed Warrants).

- In-development integration based on ECF:
  - Public Defender's Office.
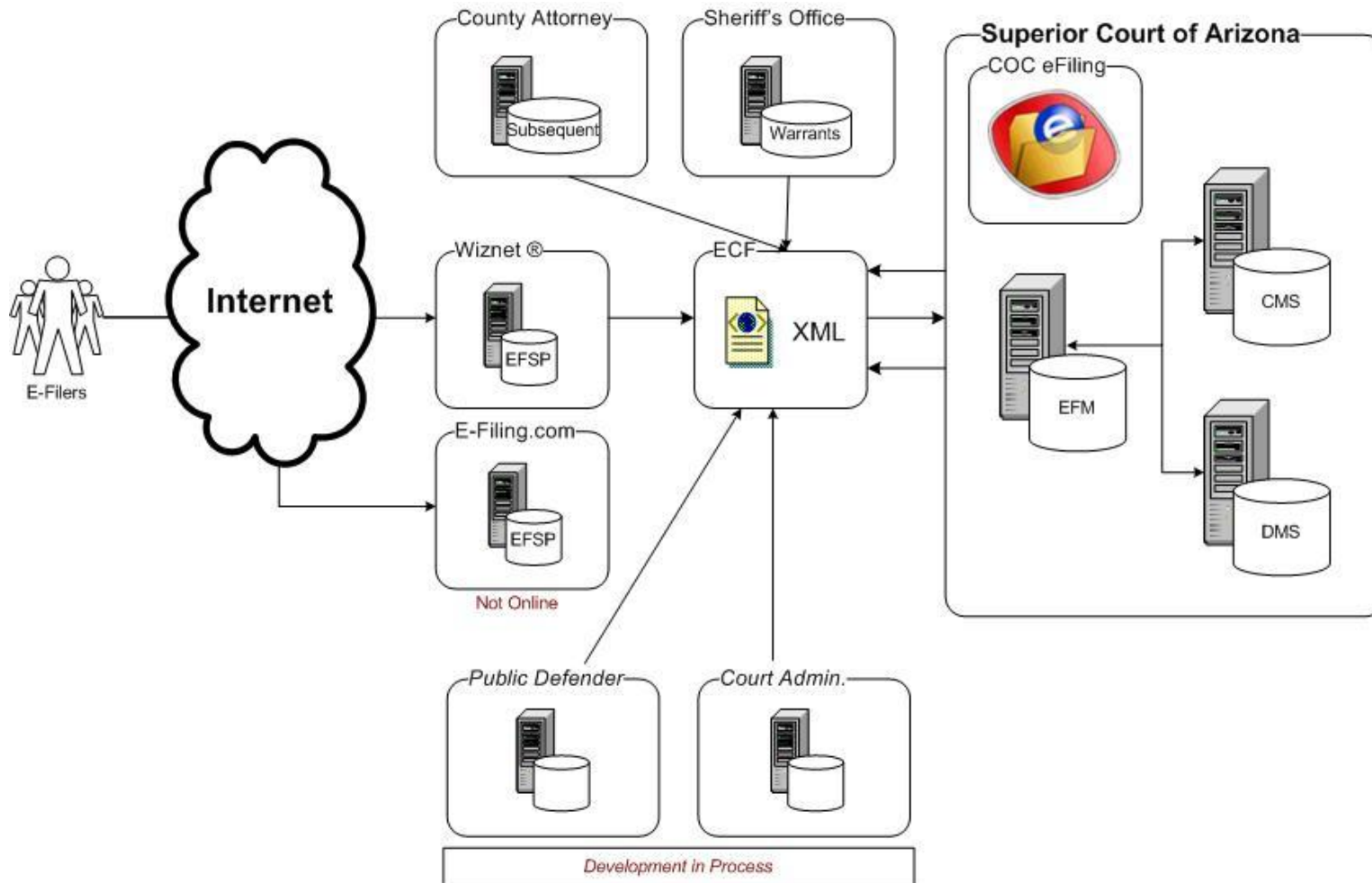 - Attorney General's Office.
  - Court administration.

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County

- As a result of this pilot and the lessons learned, Maricopa County pursued a multi-vendor e-filing model.

- Setting up the environment:
  - Created its own EFM, including Clerk Review and Judge Review modules.
  - Tightly integrated EFM with case and document management systems.
  - Qualified e-filing vendors.
  - Worked with e-filing vendors to integrate their systems with the court's EFM system.

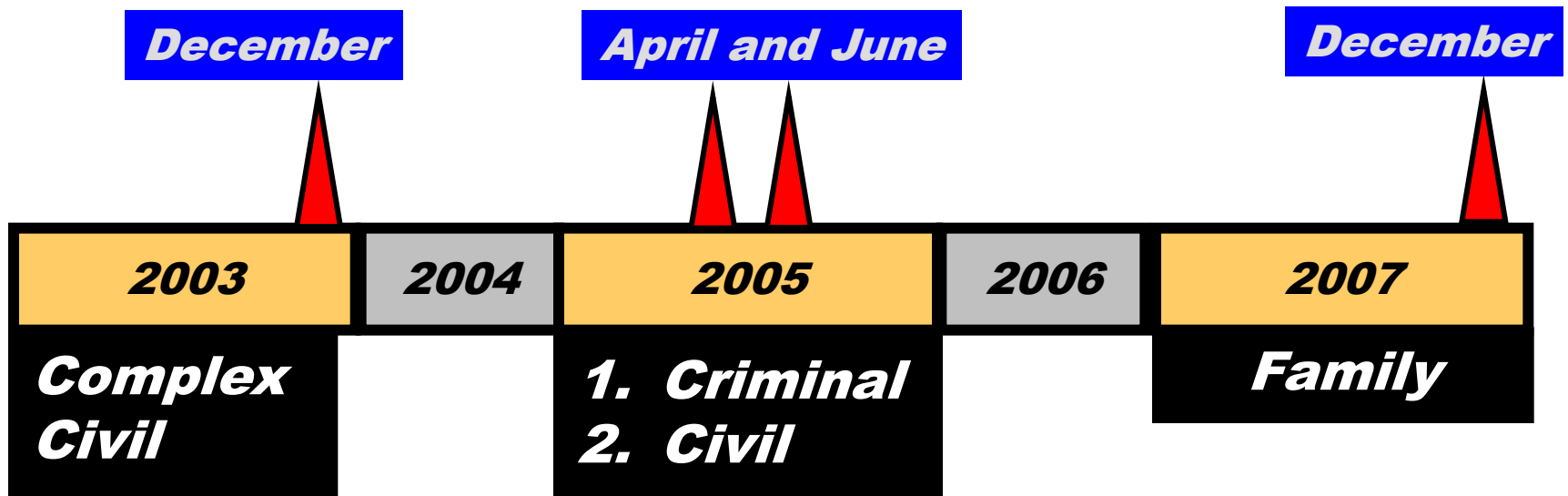# Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County

- Challenge: How can vastly different vendor e-filing systems be integrated with the court's EFM?

- Answer: Adopt ECF standards.

- Why?
  - ECF allows the court to provide and manage a "single" method to accept filings from multiple entities.
  - ECF allows the court to use standard technologies already adopted within the justice community (i.e., XML and Web services).
  - ECF allows the court to develop and publish complete and detailed integration specifications for vendors to utilize for integration with EFM.
  - ECF allows the court to easily expand e-filing efforts and integrate in a standard way with other courts or government agencies.
  - The future may even allow for sophisticated law firms to act as their own e-filing vendors, integrating directly with the court.

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County

- All major case types are now online!

December	April and June	December

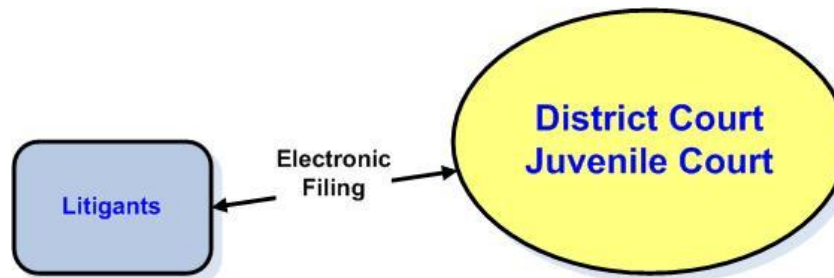| 2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Complex Civil		1. Criminal 2. Civil		Family

Utah State Courts
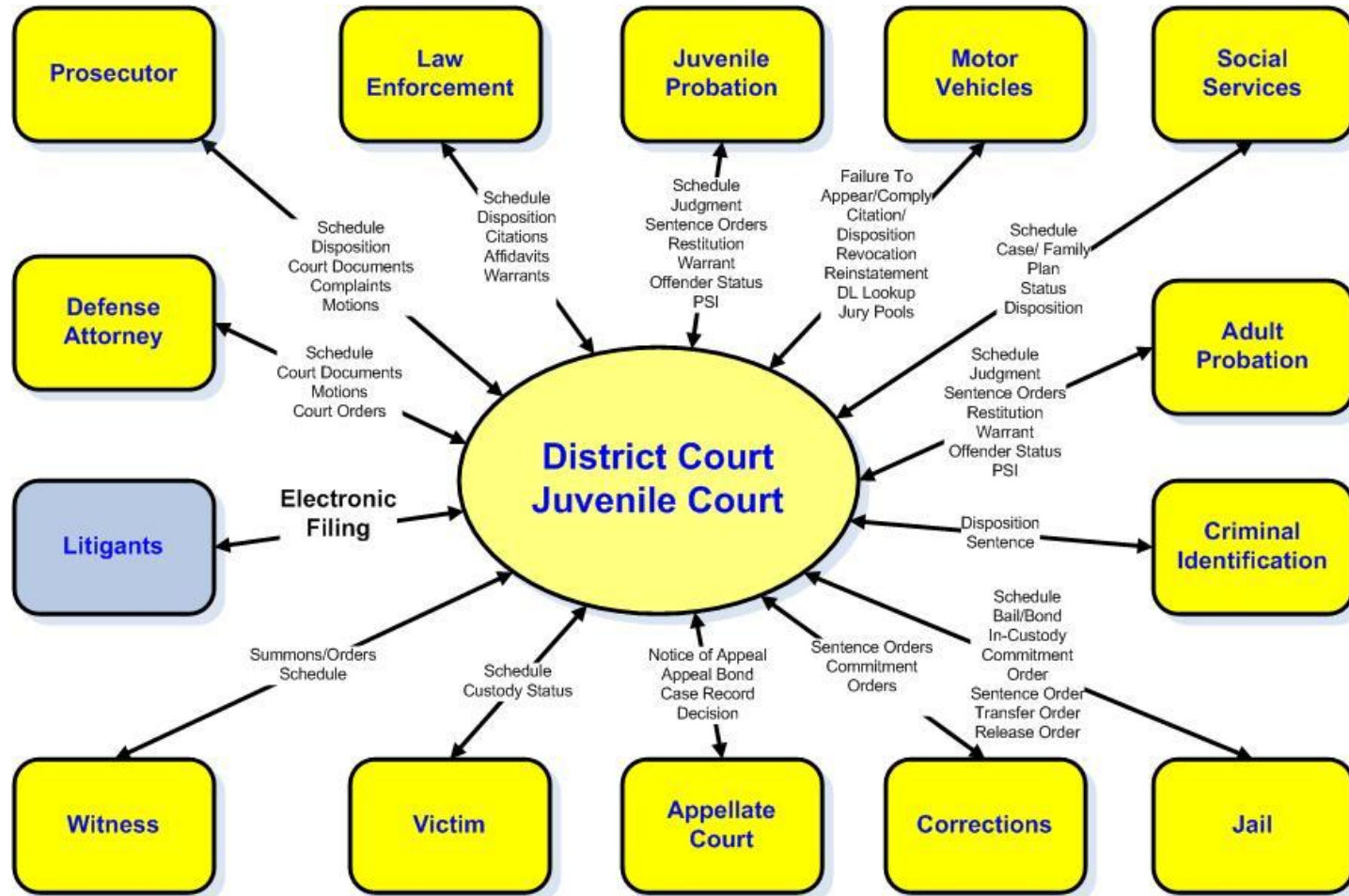
E-Filing

It isn't just for attorneys anymore!

The Utah courts' adoption of ECF 4.0
to facilitate *all* information exchanges

Utah State Courts

- E-filing developed and marketed as a way to facilitate civil filings by attorneys.

- This approach ignores all other court exchange partners.

And there are many!

Utah State Courts

- Utah courts have developed multiple information exchanges over time.

- Examples include:
  - Civil litigation.
  - Criminal dispositions.
  - Traffic citations.
  - Driver history.

The traditional approach to information exchange.

- Unique exchanges developed for each exchange partner and application.

- Multiple customized exchange formats.

- Multiple authentication techniques.

- Multiple security profiles.

- Usually involves the batch transfer of information initiated by one of the exchange partners.

The problem with this approach.

Maintenance of each customized exchange.

- Both parties need to agree to change.
- Changes to both systems need to be coordinated.
- Customized security for each exchange, usually within the application.
- Requests for information cannot be initiated by a remote system.
- Change is difficult to manage.

ECF 4.0 promotes universal information exchanges.

- This is because the exchange is based on:
  - Standardized data dictionary.
  - Standardized exchange format.
  - Standardized exchange content.
  - Standardized security profile.
  - Standardized authentication and authorization.

# In Utah, the court is using the components of ECF 4.0 to establish:

- A single point of entry to support all exchanges in the trial, juvenile, and appellant case management systems.

- A common method to authenticate exchange partners using certificates.

- A common exchange protocol using XML.

- A common security profile to protect exchange content using WS-Security.

- Reuse of the technology.

Systems Integration Services

The Utah courts have applied this approach to:

- E-filing.
- Citation e-filing.
- Prosecutor civil and criminal e-filing and notification.
- Vehicle/driver record validation with DMV.
- Disposition reporting to criminal and driver record repositories.
- Electronic payments for all moneys owed.
- Court document signature and issuance.
- Document digital certification.
- Document self-certification.

Utah Exchange Systems Architecture
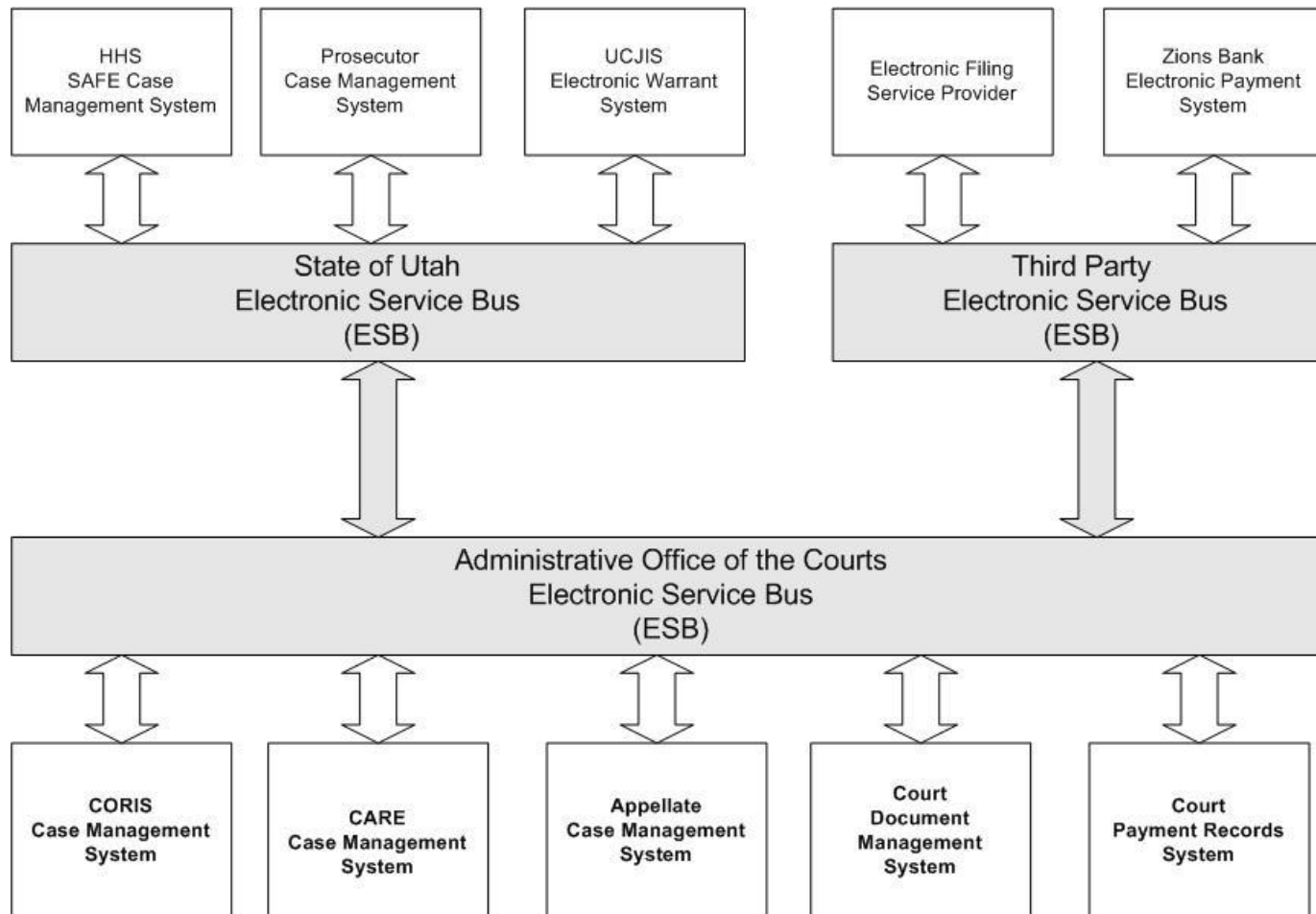
Examples of the use of the Web services approach in use in Utah:

- Electronic warrant: affidavit and warrant document creation, submission, judge review, and issuance.

- Juvenile court and child protective services systems integration.

- E-filing, electronic notice, and service.

- Digital document signatures, certification, and validation.

- Document storage and retrieval.

- Document self-certification.

- Electronic case record on demand.

Summary

- ECF 4.0 will benefit courts that have or need e-filing.

- ECF is ready for deployment now.

- Support can be requested through LegalXML for help with adopting the recommended standards.

- Ongoing work by the ECF Technical Committee will continue to add functions and capabilities to the specification.

Questions?

Getting the e-filing specification (ECF 4.0):
http://docs.oasis-open.org/legalxml-courtfiling/specs/ecf/v4.0/

Contacting the Committee:

Mr. Ron Bowmaster, Chair, ronb@email.utcourts.gov
Mr. James E. Cabral Jr., Member, jcabral@mtgmc.com

Thanks to the many contributors to the standard!