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Supreme Court of Missouri reassigns Ferguson municipal division cases

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – To help restore public trust and confidence in the Ferguson municipal court division, the Supreme Court of Missouri today transferred Judge Roy L Richter of the Missouri Court of Appeals, Eastern District, to the St. Louis County circuit court, where he will be assigned to hear all of Ferguson’s pending and future municipal division cases. This assignment, made pursuant to the Court’s authority under article V of the Missouri Constitution, will take effect Monday, March 16, 2015, and will continue until further order of the Court.

The Court’s order also authorizes Richter to implement needed reforms to court policies and procedures in Ferguson to ensure that the rights of defendants are respected and to help restore the integrity of the system.

“Judge Richter will bring a fresh, disinterested perspective to this court’s practices and he is able and willing to implement needed reforms,” Chief Justice Mary R. Russell said. She noted that the Court also is assigning staff from its state courts administrator’s office to review Ferguson municipal court practices and to assist Richter in making necessary changes.

“Extraordinary action is warranted in Ferguson, but the Court also is examining reforms that are needed on a statewide basis,” Russell said. The Court continues to review specific recommendations for further changes to Rule 37, which governs the procedure of cases in all municipal court divisions. Among the changes the Court made in December 2014 to Rule 37 was a modification making clear that if a person demonstrates an inability to pay a fine, the municipal judge will be required to give the person more time to pay. The Court also will be developing “best practices” for those issues that are not well-suited to the one-size-fits-all approach of rulemaking and regulation. This process is informed by input from those practitioners, judges and outside advocates who are most familiar with the wide variety of Missouri’s municipal court divisions. Specific recommendations from these stakeholders have been, and will continue to be, studied and adopted when appropriate.

“More than two-thirds of all Missouri court cases are filed in the municipal divisions,” Russell said. “Though these are not courts of record, they are the first – and sometimes the only – impression Missourians have of their court system. Although we recognize the local control our statutes give these uniquely local entities, we must not sacrifice individual rights and society’s collective commitment to justice.”

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The transfer order is attached:



[transfer order 03-09-15.pdf](#)

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