

**RULE 15. ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND
STILL PHOTOGRAPHY COVERAGE
OF PUBLIC JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS**

(a) **Definition.** The terms "electronic media coverage" and "electronic coverage" are used in the generic sense to include coverage by television, motion picture and still photography cameras, broadcast microphones and recorders.

(b) **Coverage Allowed.** Electronic media and still photography coverage of public judicial proceedings shall be allowed in the appellate and trial courts of this state, subject to the conditions below.

(1) The presiding justice or judge shall at all times have authority to prohibit or terminate electronic media and still photography coverage of public judicial proceedings, in the courtroom or the corridors immediately adjacent thereto.

(2) Coverage of the following types of judicial proceedings is expressly prohibited: adoption proceedings, juvenile proceedings, proceedings held before clerks of court, proceedings held before magistrates, probable cause proceedings, child custody proceedings, divorce proceedings, temporary and permanent alimony proceedings, proceedings for the hearing of motions to suppress evidence, proceedings involving trade secrets, and in camera proceedings.

(3) Coverage of the following categories of witnesses is expressly prohibited: police informants, minors, undercover agents, relocated witnesses, and victims and families of victims of sex crimes.

(4) Coverage of jurors is prohibited expressly at any stage of a judicial proceeding, including that portion of a proceeding during which a jury is selected. The trial judge shall inform all potential jurors at the beginning of the jury selection process of the restrictions of this particular provision which is designated (b)(4).

(c) **Location of Equipment and Personnel.**

(1) The location of equipment and personnel necessary for electronic media and still photographic coverage of trial proceedings shall be at a place either inside or outside the courtroom in such a manner that equipment and personnel are completely obscured from view from within the courtroom and not heard by anyone inside the courtroom.

(i) If located within the courtroom, this area must be set apart by a booth or other partitioning device constructed therein at the expense of the media. Such construction must be in harmony with the general architectural style and decor of the courtroom and must meet the approval of the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge and the governing body of the county or municipality that owns the facility.

(ii) If located outside the courtroom any booth or other partitioning device

must be built so that passage to and from the courtroom will not be obstructed. This arrangement must meet the approval of the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge and the governing body of the county or municipality that owns the facility.

(2) Appropriate openings to allow photographic coverage of the proceedings under these rules may be made in the booth or partitioning device, provided that no one in the courtroom will see or hear any photographic or audio equipment or the personnel operating such equipment. Those in the courtroom are not to know when or if any such equipment is in operation.

(3) The presiding judge may, however, exercise his or her discretion to permit the use of electronic media and still photography coverage without booths or other restrictions set out in Rule 15(c)(1) and (c)(2) if the use can be made without disruption of the proceedings and without distraction to the jurors and other participants. Such permission may be withdrawn at any time.

(4) Video tape recording equipment which is not a component part of a television camera shall be located in an area remote from the courtroom.

(5) Media personnel shall not exit or enter the booth area or courtroom once the proceedings are in session except during a court recess or adjournment.

(6) Electronic media equipment and still photography equipment shall not be taken into the courtroom or removed from the designated media area except at the following times:

- (i) prior to the convening of proceedings;
- (ii) during the luncheon recess;
- (iii) during any court recess with the permission of the presiding justice or judge; and
- (iv) after adjournment for the day of the proceedings.

(7) The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, may waive the requirements of Rule 15(c)(1) and (2) with respect to judicial proceedings in the Supreme Court and in the Court of Appeals, respectively.

(d) Official Representatives of the Media.

(1) This Court hereby designates the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters, the Radio and Television News Directors Association of the Carolinas, and the North Carolina Press Association, as the official representatives of the news media. The governing boards of these associations shall designate one person to represent the television media, one person to represent the radio broadcasters, and one person to represent still photographers in each county in which electronic media and still photographic coverage is desired. The names of the persons so designated shall be forwarded to the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, the Director of

the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the county manager or other official responsible for administrative matters in the county or municipality in which coverage is desired. Thereafter, these persons shall conduct all negotiations with the appropriate officials concerning the construction of the booths or partitioning devices referred to above. Such persons shall also be the only persons authorized to speak for the media to the presiding judge concerning the coverage of any judicial proceedings.

(2) It is the express intent and purpose of this rule to preclude judges and other officials from having to "negotiate" with various representatives of the news media. Since these rules require pooling of equipment and personnel, cooperation by the media is of the essence and the designation of three media representatives is expressly intended to prevent presiding judges from having to engage in discussion with others from the media.

(e) Equipment and Personnel.

(1) Not more than two television cameras shall be permitted in any trial or appellate court proceedings.

(2) Not more than one still photographer, utilizing not more than two still cameras with not more than two lenses for each camera and related equipment for print purposes, shall be permitted in any proceeding in a trial or appellate court.

(3) Not more than one wired audio system for radio broadcast purposes shall be permitted in any proceeding in a trial or appellate court. Audio pickup for all media purposes shall be accomplished with existing audio systems present in the court facility. If no technically suitable audio system exists in the court facility, microphones and related wiring essential for media purposes may be installed and maintained at media expense. The microphones and wiring must be unobtrusive and shall be located in places designated in advance of any proceeding by the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge of the judicial district in which the court facility is located. Such modifications or additions must be -approved by the governing body of the county or municipality which owns the facility. Provided, however, hand-held audio tape recorders may be used upon prior notification to, and with the approval of, the presiding judge; such approval may be withdrawn at any time.

(4) Any "Pooling" arrangements among the media required by these limitations on equipment and personnel shall be the sole responsibility of the media without calling upon the presiding judge to mediate any dispute as to the appropriate media representative or equipment authorized to cover a particular proceeding. In the absence of advance media agreement on disputed equipment or personnel issues, the presiding judge shall exclude all contesting media personnel from a proceeding.

(5) In no event shall the number of personnel in the designated area exceed the number necessary to operate the designated equipment or which can comfortably be secluded in the restricted area.

(f) Sound and Light Criteria.

(1) Only television photographic and audio equipment which does not produce distracting sound or light shall be employed to cover judicial proceedings. No artificial lighting device of any kind shall be employed in connection with the television camera.

(2) Only still camera equipment which/does not produce distracting sound or light shall be employed to cover judicial proceedings. No artificial lighting device of any kind shall be employed in connection with a still camera.

(g) Courtroom Light Sources. With the concurrence of the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge of the judicial district in which a court facility is situated, modifications and additions may be made in light sources existing in the facility, provided such modifications or additions are installed and maintained without public expense and provided such modifications or additions are approved by the governing body of the county or municipality which owns the facility.

(h) Conferences of Counsel. To protect the attorney-client privilege and the right to counsel, there shall be no audio pickup or broadcast of conferences which occur in a court facility between attorneys and their clients, between co-counsel of a client, between adverse counsel, or between counsel and the presiding judge held at the bench.

(i) Impermissible Use of Media Material. None of the film, video tape, still photographs or audio reproductions developed during or by virtue of coverage of a judicial proceeding shall be admissible as evidence in the proceeding out of which it arose, any proceeding subsequent and collateral thereto, or upon any retrial or appeal of such proceedings.

[Former version of this rule suspended on an experimental basis effective October 18, 1982; amended June 13, 1990]