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Kent County Creates New 'Business Court'

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On March 1, 2012, the Kent County Circuit Court initiated a pilot program for lawsuits involving commercial and business disputes. Titled the "Specialized Business Docket" ("SBD"), the program was approved for only the most populated counties in Michigan, Kent County being one of the three counties approved.

All business and partnership claims filed in the Kent County Circuit Court will be assigned to the SBD and will be handled by Judge Christopher P. Yates who has previously handled a broad range of cases involving commercial matters, including divorce actions that involve business interests. Judge Yates has a Master's of Business Administration Degree from the University of Illinois and, prior to becoming a Kent County Circuit Judge, worked as a federal prosecutor handling investigations of complicated financial transactions. Under the SBD, Judge Yates will be automatically assigned all SBD matters involving partnership termination, business accounting, corporate receivership, unlawful trade practices and essentially any litigation involving commercial disputes.

The cases assigned to the SBD are subject to a new electronic filing system. Other than the initial Complaint, all documents required to be filed with the Court must now be filed through a sophisticated, efficient electronic system through the county's interactive website. The SBD website will also include written opinions and orders prepared by Judge Yates in virtually every case assigned to the SBD. While these written opinions and orders do not necessarily control outcomes in other cases, access to Judge Yates' opinions provides commercial litigants an opportunity to review Judge Yates' position on various issues and provides an indication of how Judge Yates may rule on similar issues. The availability of published opinions should help to make outcomes of litigation a bit more predictable.

Through the SBD, Kent County has endeavored to create a 21st century court system that can dispense justice efficiently even in the most complex commercial cases. The efficiency of the SBD and Judge Yates' exclusive attention to business disputes should clear the way for commercial enterprises to devote more resources and time to business, and less attention and expense to litigation. Our firm's commercial litigators are excited to participate in this program and to continue our strong professional relationship with the Kent County judiciary.