

Warrants on the iPad

By: Judge Scott J. Becker

You are probably all familiar with some way in which technology has changed your work. Each field probably has countless ways in which technology has sped up and made easier various tasks. The tasks of a judge are no different. One of the many things required of me as a judge is signing warrants. I thought you might like to hear about one of the developments in my time on the Bench that has improved the warrant process for law enforcement.

With the advent of iPads and cloud servers, I now have the ability to sign warrants for officers without them having to travel to the courthouse or to my home. In fact I have even signed warrants when I was not in Collin County or even in Texas. The process is really quite simple.

First, I have a Dropbox account. Many of you are probably familiar with this cloud based storage mechanism. It allows me to store and access materials on any computer that has the software on it. I simply open the Dropbox program and sign in under my user ID and password. This basically serves as a giant file room that I can access from anywhere. I can also share access with other people on their computers by sending invitations to specific folders within the account. Within this Dropbox account I have set up a folder for each law enforcement agency that has expressed a desire to participate. Plano PD has its own folder; McKinney PD has its own folder, and so on. Within each folder there are two more sub-folders labeled "To Be Signed" and "Signed".

Next, when officers have indicated they wish to use the Dropbox method to obtain a warrant, I simply send them an invitation to the corresponding folder for their agency. All officers from Plano can see all the contents of the Plano folder, but none of the other folders for other agencies. When an officer wants to ask for a warrant he/she can reach me on my cell phone to make sure I am available. (I'm virtually always available. When I sought this Bench I realized it was not just a 9-5 job. If the officers are out at odd hours to serve you, the least I can do is be available when they need me.)

Once they have confirmed I can review the warrant, they place it in the "To Be Signed" folder. I can then open that folder on my iPad and make sure there is probable cause. The officer's affidavit to support the issuance of the warrant must be under oath. As such, if probable cause exists, the officer has three options. One, he/she can swear to the affidavit in front of a notary. Two, he/she can swear to the affidavit in front of another police officer. Three, he/she can swear to the affidavit in front of me over a video phone connection such as FaceTime or Skype.

After they have sworn to the affidavit, they place the sworn document in the "To Be Signed" folder. Next, I open that sworn document, on my iPad in a program that allows me to sign my name. I then sign my name and export the signed document back into the "Signed" folder in Dropbox. I then text the officer the warrant is signed. They can then open it from their computer at the police station and go serve the warrant.

In the physical world this process might have as much as several hours added to it because officers had to drive from their location to the judge either at the courthouse or at the judge's home. Now that time can

be shaved off the process and officers can serve the warrant, make the arrest and/or seize the evidence more quickly.

Currently, there are several judges in the County who make themselves available this way and at the time I am writing this article, there are 12 different agencies using this method with multiple officers in each agency. Each officer that hears about it is very enthusiastic about joining the program.

This is just one of the ways we are trying to serve you more efficiently here in Collin County. My past three years on the Bench have been a blur. I've truly enjoyed serving the citizens of Collin County and, if you'll have me, I look forward to many more years of service.