



13 August 2020

Angela Noble, Clerk of the Court  
Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. U.S. Courthouse  
400 North Miami Avenue, Room 8N09  
Miami, FL 33128

**Re: Enabling complete PACER RSS feeds in Southern District of Florida**

Dear Ms. Noble,

I am writing as the executive director of Free Law Project, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in Oakland, California that works to make the U.S. legal system more fair and efficient. Recently, we completed a study of which federal courts provide a complete RSS feed of the recent cases and filings in their district. RSS feeds are a standard feature of the PACER system that allow the public to freely and efficiently learn about new filings and cases in federal courts.

Many federal courts have this feature fully enabled, but some courts, like the Southern District of Florida have the feed extremely limited. The feed in your jurisdiction only provides information about orders and motions, but excludes information about all other filing types. As one of the busiest courts in the country, we are writing to urge you to reconfigure your feed so that it has information about all recent filings.

RSS feeds enable tools like the Big Cases Twitter bot,<sup>1</sup> which monitors federal cases of public interest. In jurisdictions where RSS feeds are enabled, Big Cases uses those feeds to identify important filings, which it then purchases and shares publicly on Twitter. With an audience of fifty-four-thousand followers, the Big Cases bot routinely stimulates discussion and public awareness of newsworthy legal developments. On an individual level, complete RSS feeds of recent filings let local reporters learn when new cases are filed in their district, so they can quickly find out when there is new momentous litigation, without having to periodically login to PACER and run reports. For the general public, RSS feeds allow Americans to quickly learn when opinions and other case filings happen, a feature that CMECF allows for members of each local bar via email, but that is not generally allowed for members of the general public.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://twitter.com/big\\_cases](https://twitter.com/big_cases)

Echoing these points, the importance of PACER RSS feeds came up during the first meeting of the PACER User Group, where the “[g]roup requested that courts be strongly encouraged by the AO to turn on the RSS feature and provide full docket entry/activity feeds.”<sup>2</sup>

We have not contacted your district on this topic before now, but for several years, we have contacted other courts to urge them to fully enable their feeds. Many have done so. In the past few weeks for example, both the Central District for California and the District of Oregon have have reconfigured their feeds to provide all recent filings. Judging from the outside, it appears such reconfigurations can be done by IT staff in a matter of hours.

While talking to Clerks and Directors of Operations at various courts, we have heard a few gut responses that we believe are easily addressed:

1. **Objection:** Sealed content might be revealed.  
**Response:** Sealed content does not appear in RSS feeds. This is demonstrated by the numerous courts that have their feeds fully enabled.
2. **Objection:** RSS feeds could undermine the Public Access Fee Schedule.  
**Response:** Feeds do not provide access to dockets or PDFs, but merely provide an index that lists the existence of these items. Access to RSS feeds should increase PACER revenue as interested parties learn about content they might not otherwise know existed.
3. **Objection:** RSS feeds may require more powerful servers to support.  
**Response:** In discussions with courts, we have learned that the RSS feeds are cached and that their generation frequency is configurable. Furthermore, 112 courts currently have RSS feeds enabled without limitation, including many of the busiest courts in the country. To the extent this is a concern, it appears that it can be addressed.

Taken altogether, it appears that enabling unrestricted RSS feeds is generally a simple and safe process once a decision has been made. Doing so creates tangible benefits for journalists, members of the public, and those that support them, like our organization.

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2 PACER User Group February 27-28, 2020 meeting summary, available at: [https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/epa\\_publicusergroup\\_feb2020\\_mtgsummary\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/epa_publicusergroup_feb2020_mtgsummary_0.pdf)

We respectfully request that you consider removing restrictions on your district's PACER RSS feed as soon as possible so that the public can benefit from greater access to this information.

If you should wish to discuss this further, we welcome further discussion.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael Lissner