



3 September 2020

David Ciambuschini  
Attorney Advocate  
101 West Lombard Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

**Re: Enabling complete PACER RSS feeds in the District of Maryland**

Dear Mr. Ciambuschini,

I am writing to urge the District Court of Maryland to fully enable an existing feature of the PACER system: RSS feeds of all recent cases and filings in your jurisdiction. I am 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.

We found that although 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, your district has it completely disabled. Of the 17 federal courts that are larger by population than the the District of Maryland, only four have the feed completely disabled. We urge you to reconfigure your PACER system at your earliest convenience so that it joins the other large federal courts in the country in sharing this vital resource.

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 CM/ECF allows for members of each local bar via email, but that is not generally allowed for members of the general public.

RSS feeds also 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

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

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.

Echoing these points, the importance of PACER RSS feeds came up during the first and second meetings of the new PACER User Group. The notes from the first meeting explain that the, “[g]roup requested that courts be strongly encouraged by the [Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts] to turn on the RSS feature and provide full docket entry/activity feeds.”<sup>2</sup> The notes from the second meeting were published Tuesday, and state that the AO will soon, “conduct outreach [...] to encourage all federal courts” to “fully and consistently implement RSS feeds.”<sup>3</sup>

In a recent blog post, the Reporter’s Committee for Freedom of the Press, an influential association of reporters and editors, said that, “every court should implement a *complete* RSS feed as an efficient means of notifying the press and public about case developments”<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added).

We first contacted your district about PACER RSS feeds in 2018. We were unable to enable your feeds then, but since that time we have contacted many other courts to urge them to fully enable their feeds. Many have done so. In the past few weeks for example, the Central District for California and the District of Oregon have reconfigured their feeds to provide all recent filings. The Northern District of Texas enabled theirs for the first time.

Judging from the outside, it appears such reconfigurations can be done by IT staff in a matter of hours.

While talking to the Clerks, IT staff, and Directors of Operations at these courts, we have heard a few responses that have been 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 pro-

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2 PACER User Group February 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)

3 PACER User Group June meeting summary, available at:  
[https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/epa\\_public\\_user\\_group\\_conference\\_call\\_minutes\\_june\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/epa_public_user_group_conference_call_minutes_june_2020_0.pdf)

4 <https://www.rcfp.org/appeals-court-ruling-pacer-fees/>

vide an index that lists the existence of these items. If anything, 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 normally configured to only update on a preset schedule, after which point the updated content is saved in a “cache” for future viewers. This smart approach from the creators of PACER means that RSS feeds are only updated infrequently, instead of every time they are downloaded. This limits the impact on court infrastructure.

Furthermore, 112 courts currently have RSS feeds enabled without limitation, including some of the busiest courts in the country. To the extent impact on court infrastructure is a concern, it can be easily addressed.

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

We respectfully request that you consider enabling 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,



Michael Lissner  
Executive Director  
Free Law Project