

“Tablet Tips for Judges: Working Smarter not Harder”
By: Scott J. Becker, Judge 219th District Court, Collin County, Texas

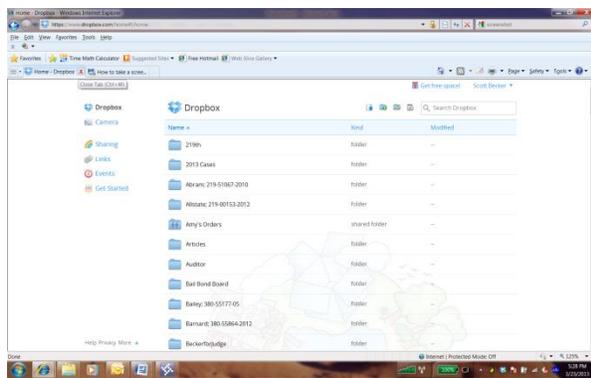
I admit I am a “Star Wars” nerd of the highest order. I know far more about the trivia of those movies than any grown man should admit. While the days of holograms in the courtroom are not quite here, there are some other technological advances that might be useful to you on the bench. I have come across a new paperless method for reviewing and signing warrants. This new method involves an iPad, Dropbox, and Notes Plus.¹ There are several steps in this process which I will walk you through in this article.

Step 1: Download Dropbox

First, you’ll need an iPad or similar tablet device. On that iPad you will need to have loaded the software app called Dropbox.² The icon for the app looks like this on the right. Think of this program as your own personal computer server. It’s free for the first 2.5 gigabytes of space. This is a ridiculous amount of free space and should be more than sufficient to handle the process described in this article. Basically, Dropbox is a program that allows you store any type of computer file you would like into various folders that you create. These folders and their contents are then viewable on any computer from which you log into the Dropbox program. You can log in via the internet and view it over the web, or load the program onto your computer and view items through the program in Windows. If Dropbox is loaded on your iPad, you can view its contents their as well. The images below show you what Dropbox looks like from each of the aforementioned methods.



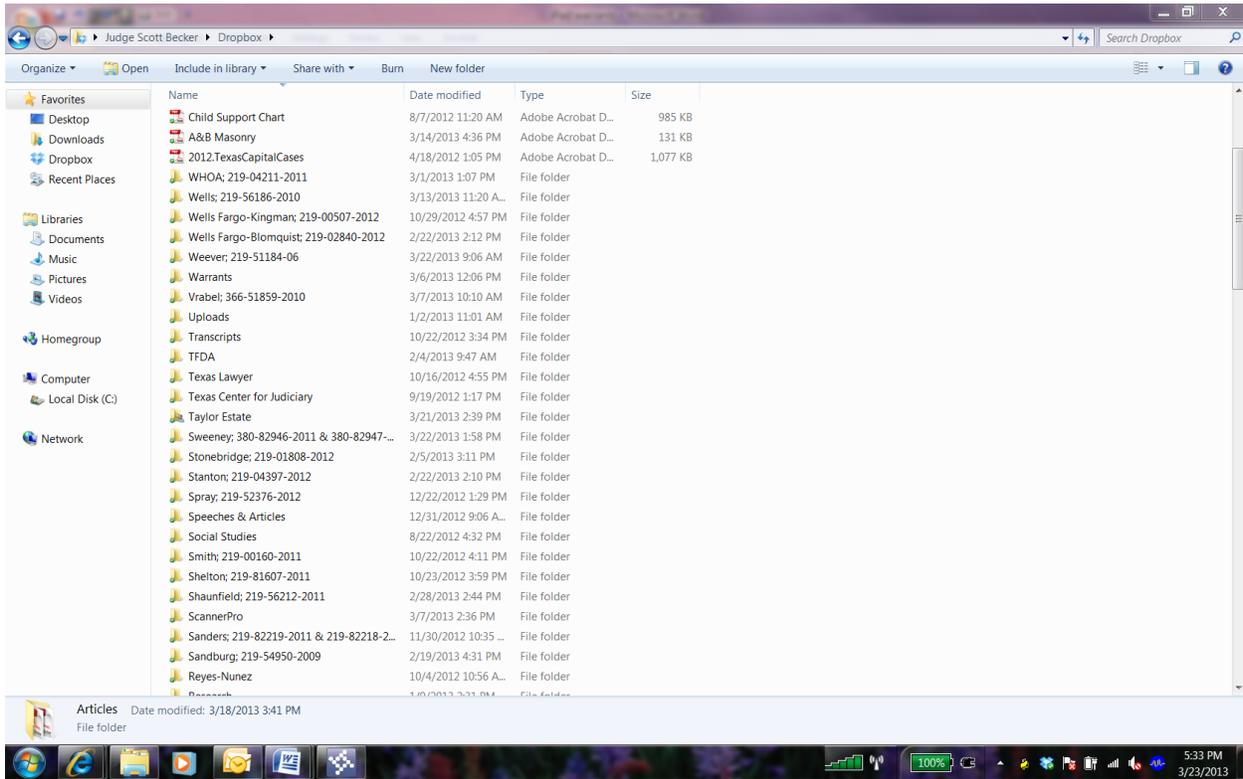
Internet View



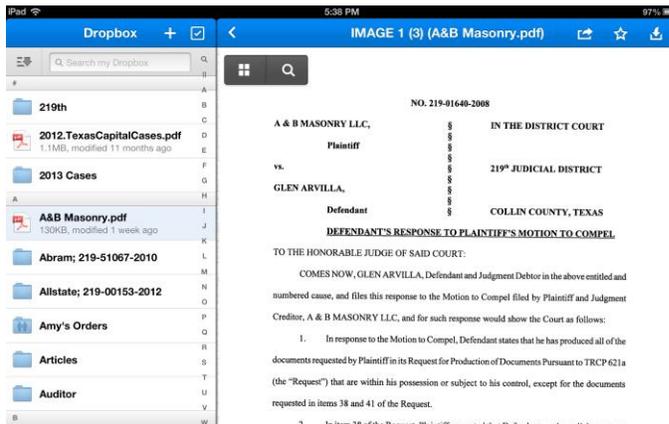
¹ I’m not trying to shill for Apple or any of the other software designers. I’m sure the method I describe will work on other platforms. These just happen to be the programs I use and am most comfortable describing.

² Loading this app is just like any other from the App Store. If you are familiar with loading other apps to your tablet, loading Dropbox will be a snap. If you are not familiar with downloading apps to your tablet, find your nearest 12 year old relative and they should be able to help you out. If you can’t find one of them, call me and I’ll be happy to walk you through the process.

Computer view through Dropbox software



Dropbox view on iPad



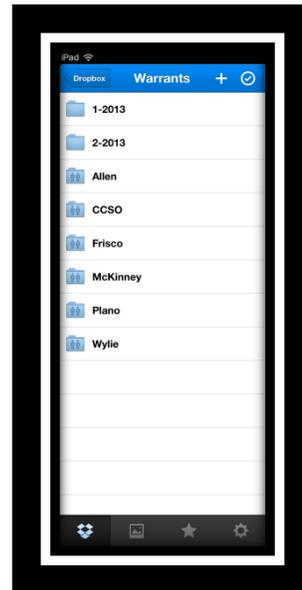
Step 2: Set up a Shared Folder

Second, once you have loaded Dropbox onto your computer and your iPad, you'll need to establish a "shared" folder. This is exactly what it sounds like. You can create a folder that you and whoever you choose can both see. The people you share with will also have to be Dropbox users. This may seem like a pyramid scheme but have no fear. There is no cost for them to join if they are not

already a member. Additionally, if they join in response to your invitation, you get an additional 500 MB of space. For warrants, I set up a shared folder with each law enforcement agency that has said they are willing to use this process.³

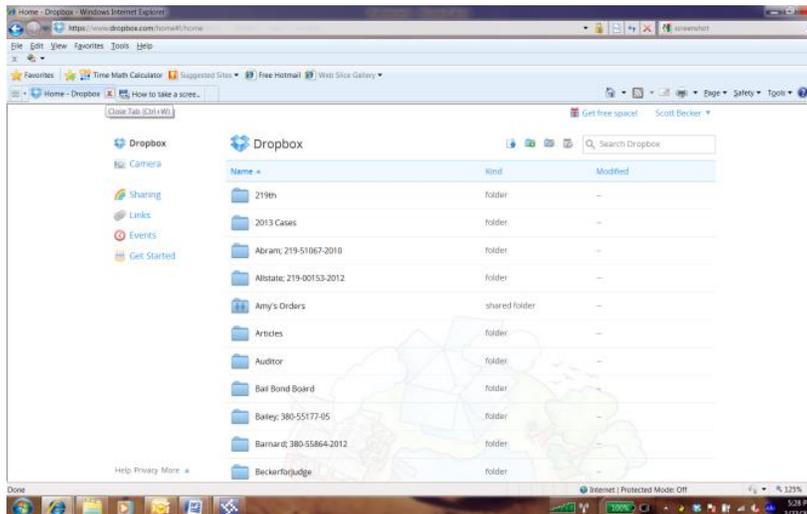
³ Every agency I have worked with has jumped at the chance to use this process because it cuts down on travel time for the officers. Please note the set up is that each agency can only see the contents of its own folder. No one agency can see inside any other agency's folder.

My shared folders look like this

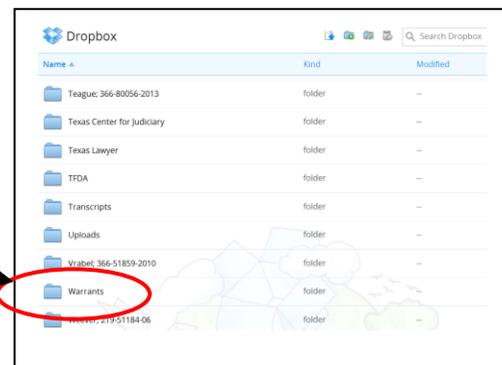


Step 3: Establishing a Shared Folder

You'll need to access Dropbox from the internet. That will look like this below:



The screenshot above is from my Dropbox account which I have been using for several months, therefore you can see I have already set up numerous folders. Your account will not look like this at first. You will want set up a folder called "Warrants"



Within each agency folder there are two folders "To

Be Signed” and “Signed”. When an officer needs a warrant, he calls or texts my cell phone. If I am available, I let him know and we move on to the next step; he then places the warrant and accompanying affidavit into the appropriate “To Be Signed” folder for his agency.

Step 4: Reviewing the Warrant

Once the documents are in Dropbox, I can read the affidavit and warrant and make sure they are in proper order. You can do that by reading the document in the viewing window of Dropbox. If it is a multi page document, you simply scroll down like you have with any other document on the iPad. The touch screen allows you to do this without using a scroll bar.

Step 5: Opening Warrant in a Signature App

Assuming the warrant and affidavit are in order and establish probable cause, you can move to the next step by opening them in a signature app. Here the officer has two options. Option one is to swear out the affidavit in front of a notary or other officer. They can then scan that sworn/signed affidavit into Dropbox and I can review to make sure the affiant’s signature is in order. Option two is for the officer to swear to the affidavit while I watch him sign it through FaceTime or Skype.

I did not include these two apps in the requirements because technically you can complete the process without these two programs. It just requires the officer to swear to the affidavit in front of a notary or other officer. However I recognize sometimes officers swear to the affidavit in front of the judge. Recent case law has indicated that officers known to the judge by voice can swear to an affidavit over the telephone.⁴ As this is okay by sound alone, my conclusion is that clearly video confirmation would pass muster. Of course if there are any appellate judge reading this article and I am wrong, please let me know.

If everything is in order, then you can open the warrant into NotesPlus⁵ on your iPad. That icon looks like this. Therefore, you can write with stylus.⁶ They harder to sign pencil since



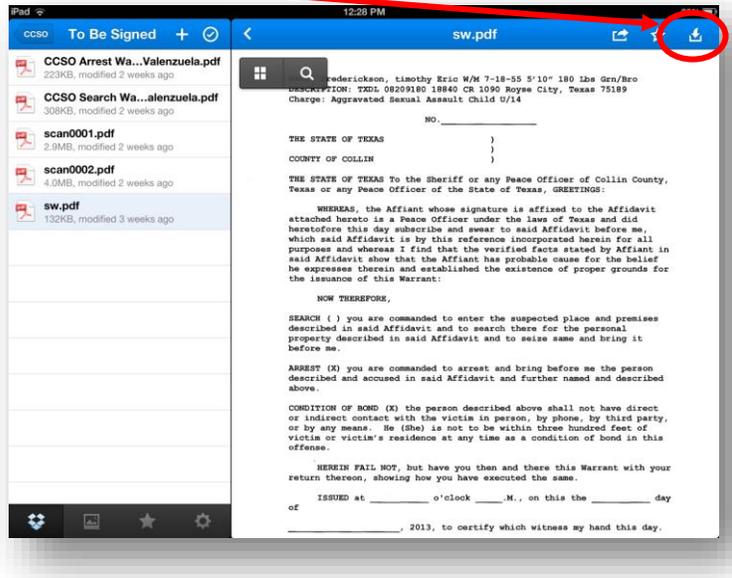
This app allows you to write as if you were using a pen and paper. You can sign the warrant with your own original signature. Although you can use your finger on an iPad, I don’t recommend it. I recommend using a stylus. They are available at any office supply store for only a few bucks. It’s a lot easier with just your finger than you might think. After using a pen or pencil in kindergarten, our hands are not used to writing without them. Your signature may look sloppy and unnatural. Of course if you are okay with that it’s up to you.

⁴*Aylor v. State*; 2011 WL 1659887 & *Clay v. State*; No. PD-0579-12.

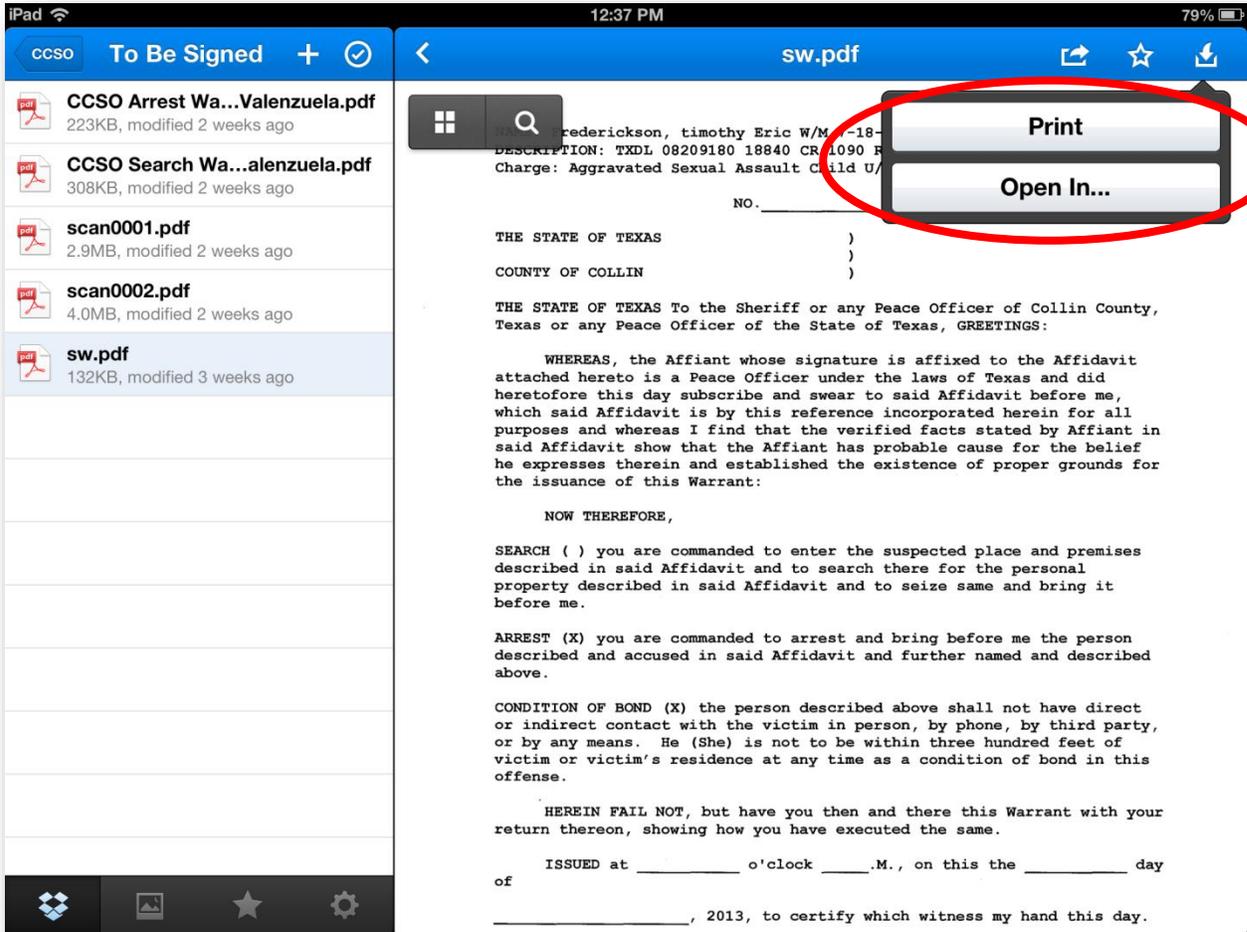
⁵ This app should be downloaded before you start this process. It actually costs about \$6.00. There is the ability to purchase a feature form inside the app that allows you to convert your handwriting to typed text. It costs \$1.00. However, I recommend against this extra purchase. This is because you need to write neatly enough for the app to be able to accurately convert your handwriting to type. If you are writing that neatly, the conversion is usually unnecessary.

⁶ My favorite stylus is made by Boxwave. Most styli have rubber tips that can occasionally skip on the screen surface and the writing looks a little rough. The Boxwave has a cloth tip allowing for smoother writing and no skipping.

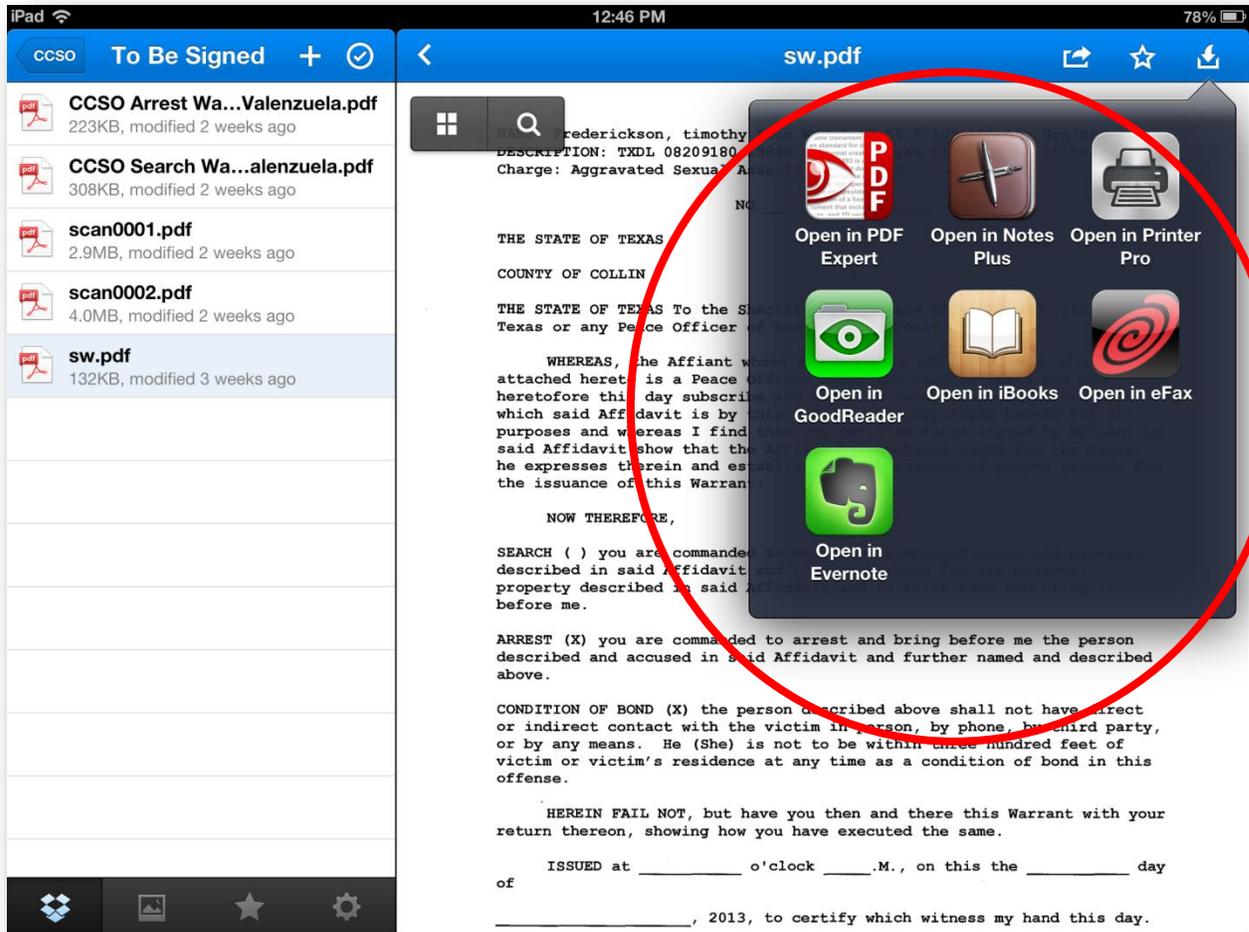
You open up the document from Dropbox into another app like Notes Plus by tapping on few symbols within the Dropbox view screen. Look in the upper right hand corner of the window for the curved arrow circled in red below.



When you tap on that arrow a menu should open up and look like this

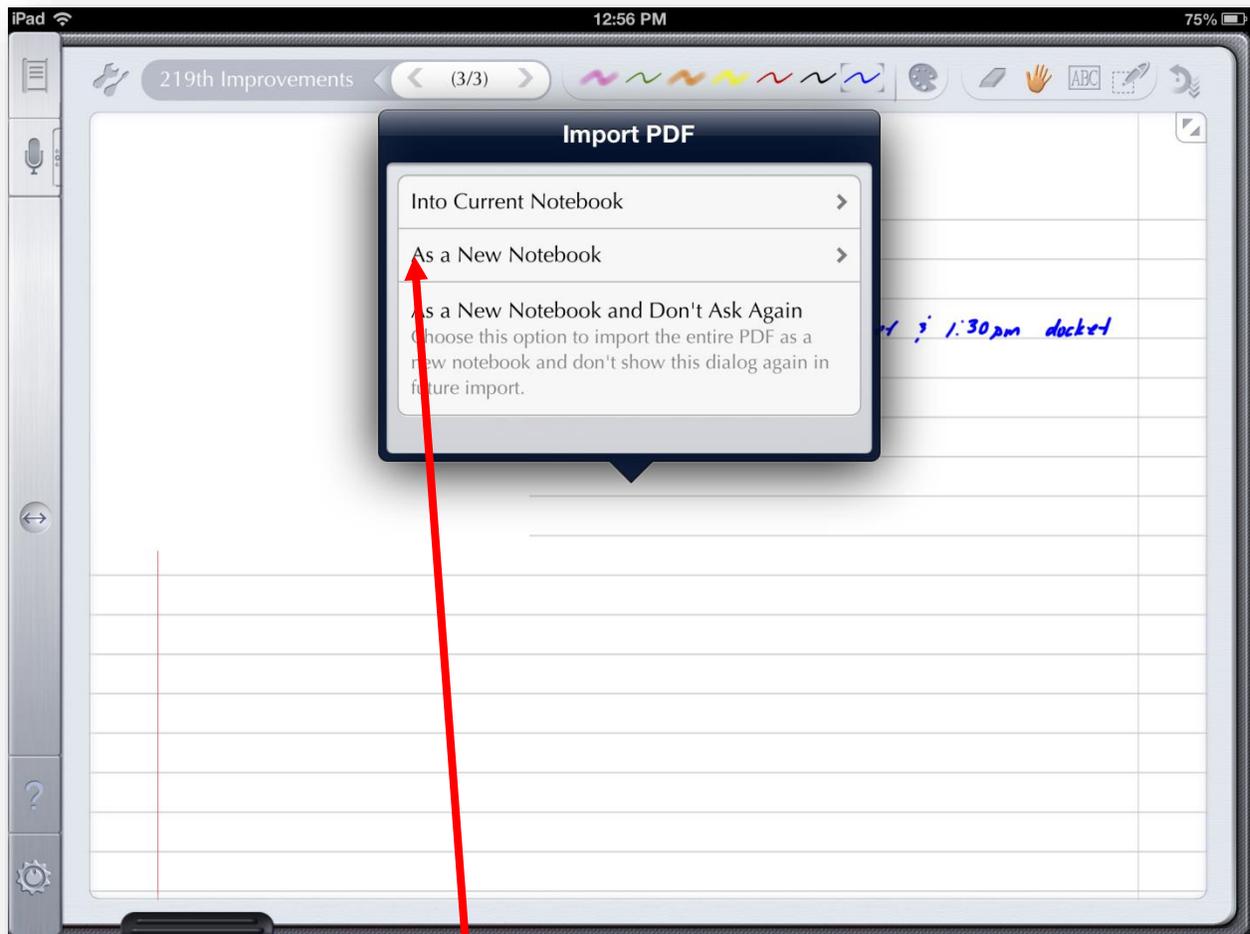


You'll want to tap the option that says "Open In...". When you do, your screen should look something like this

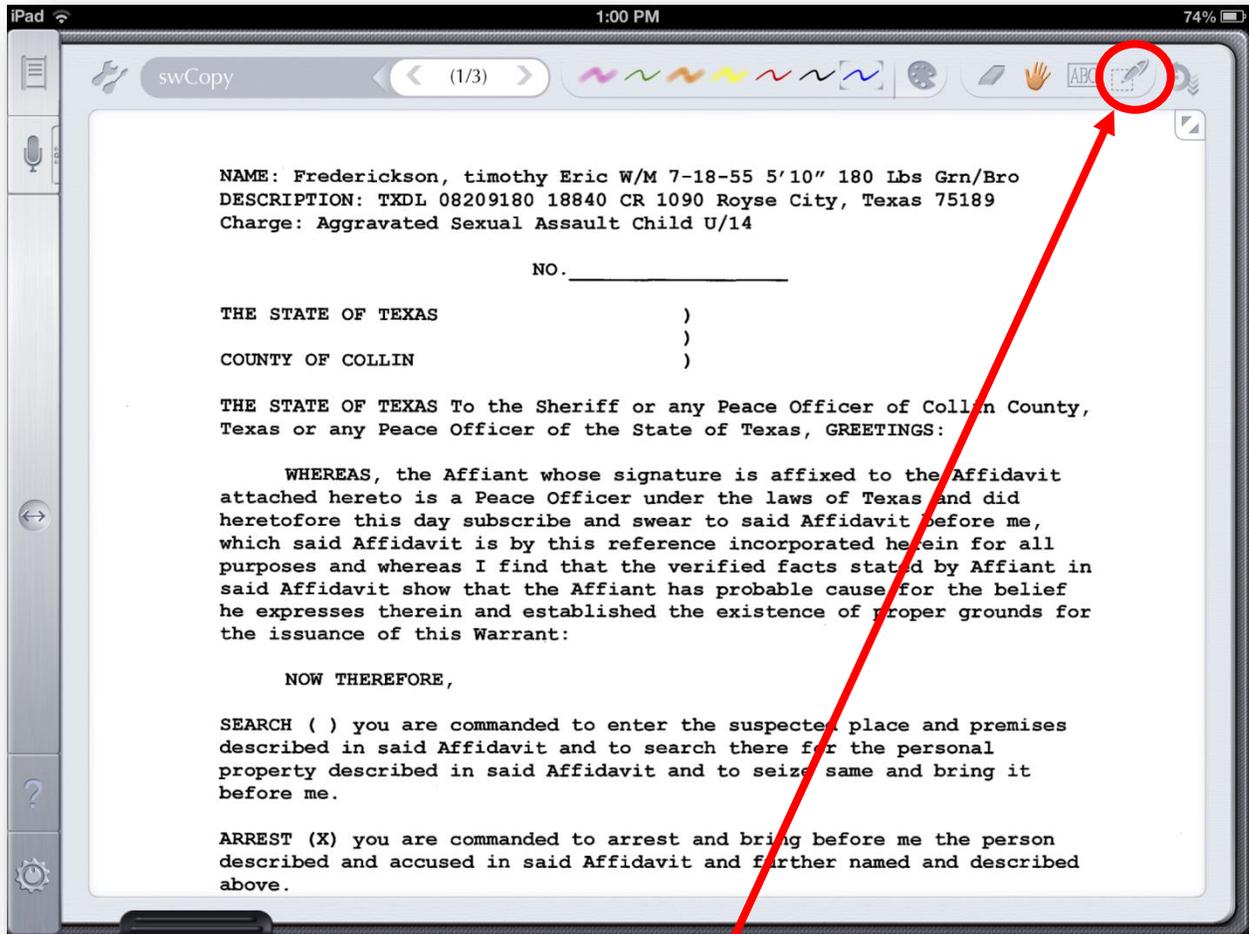


The icons you have in your menu may change depending on what's loaded on your iPad. All of these shown in this menu are designed to read the file you wish to open. Just tap on the icon representing the app you wish to use. For the next step in the signature process, you will want to use NotesPlus (however, both GoodReader and PDF Expert will also work).

Once you tap “NotesPlus” your screen should look like this

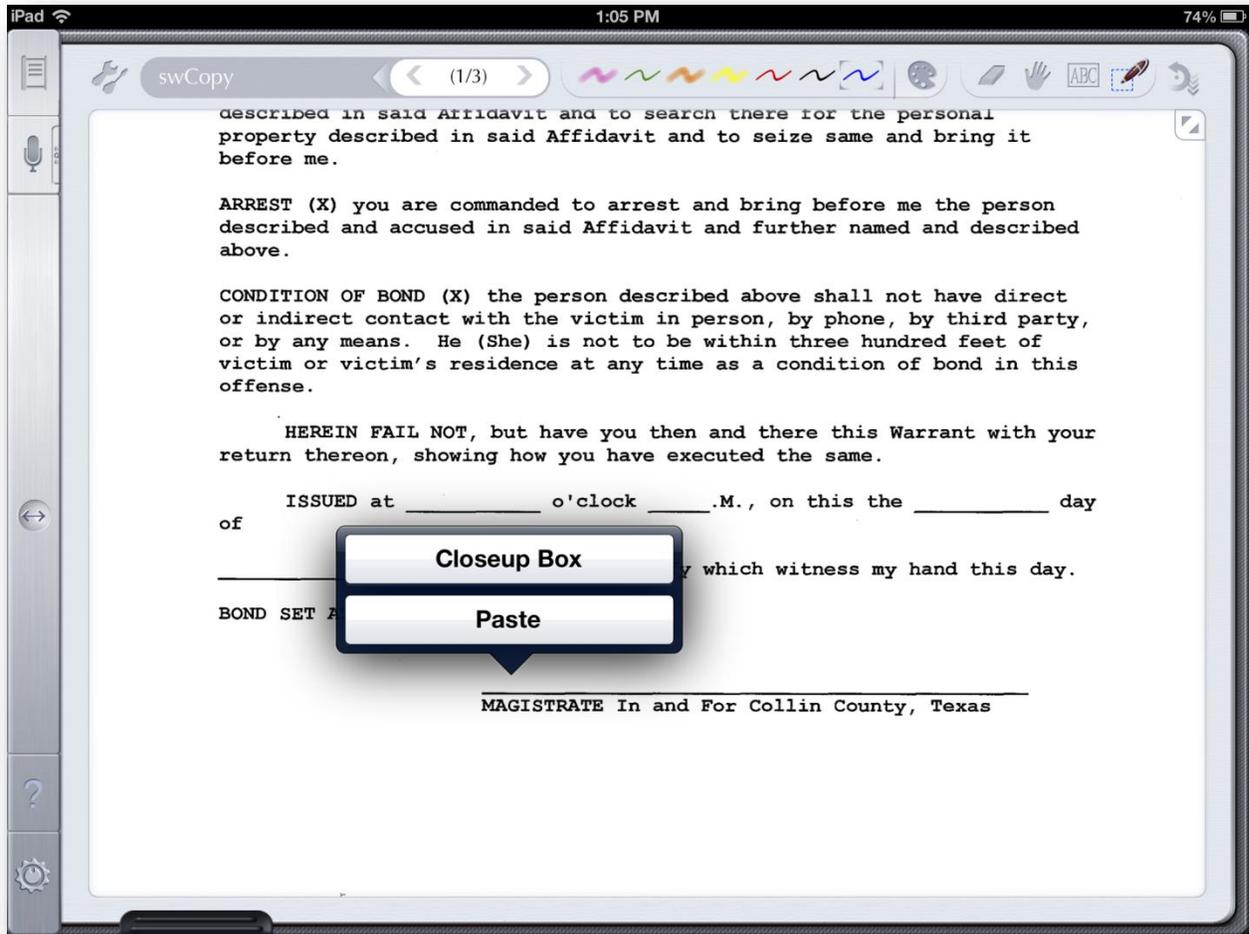


You'll want to tap “As a New Notebook” and then your screen will change to what you see next

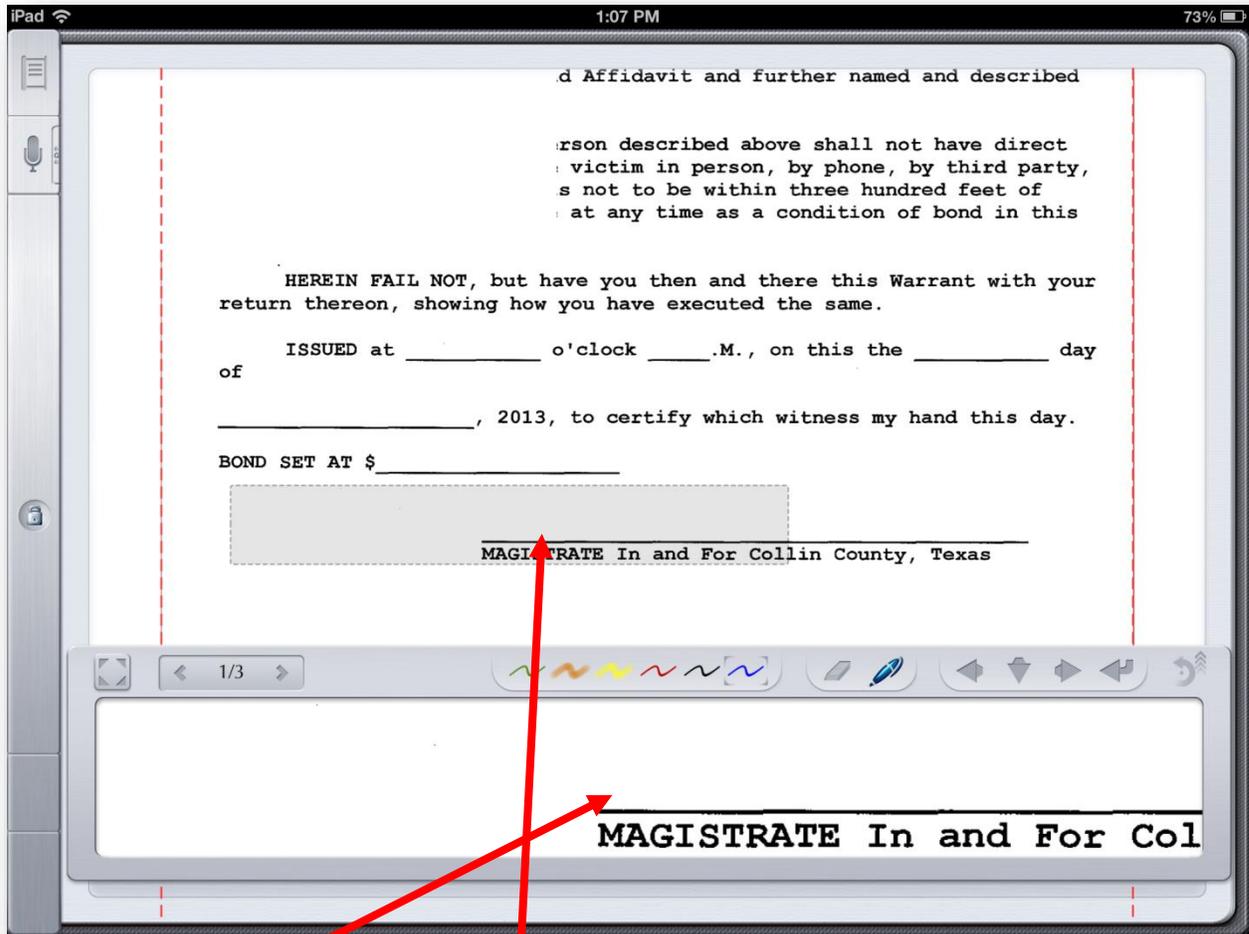


Step 6: Signing the Warrant

You'll need to tap your stylus onto the pen icon above. Once you've done that hold your stylus on the area of the document you wish to sign. Your screen will then look like this below



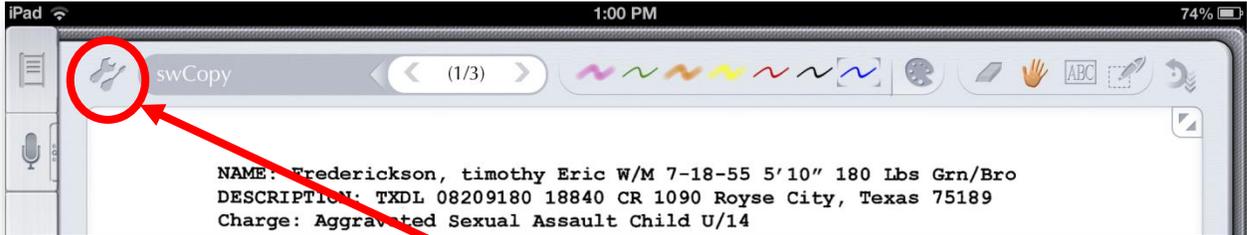
You then tap "Closeup Box" and a dotted line rectangle appears as shown next



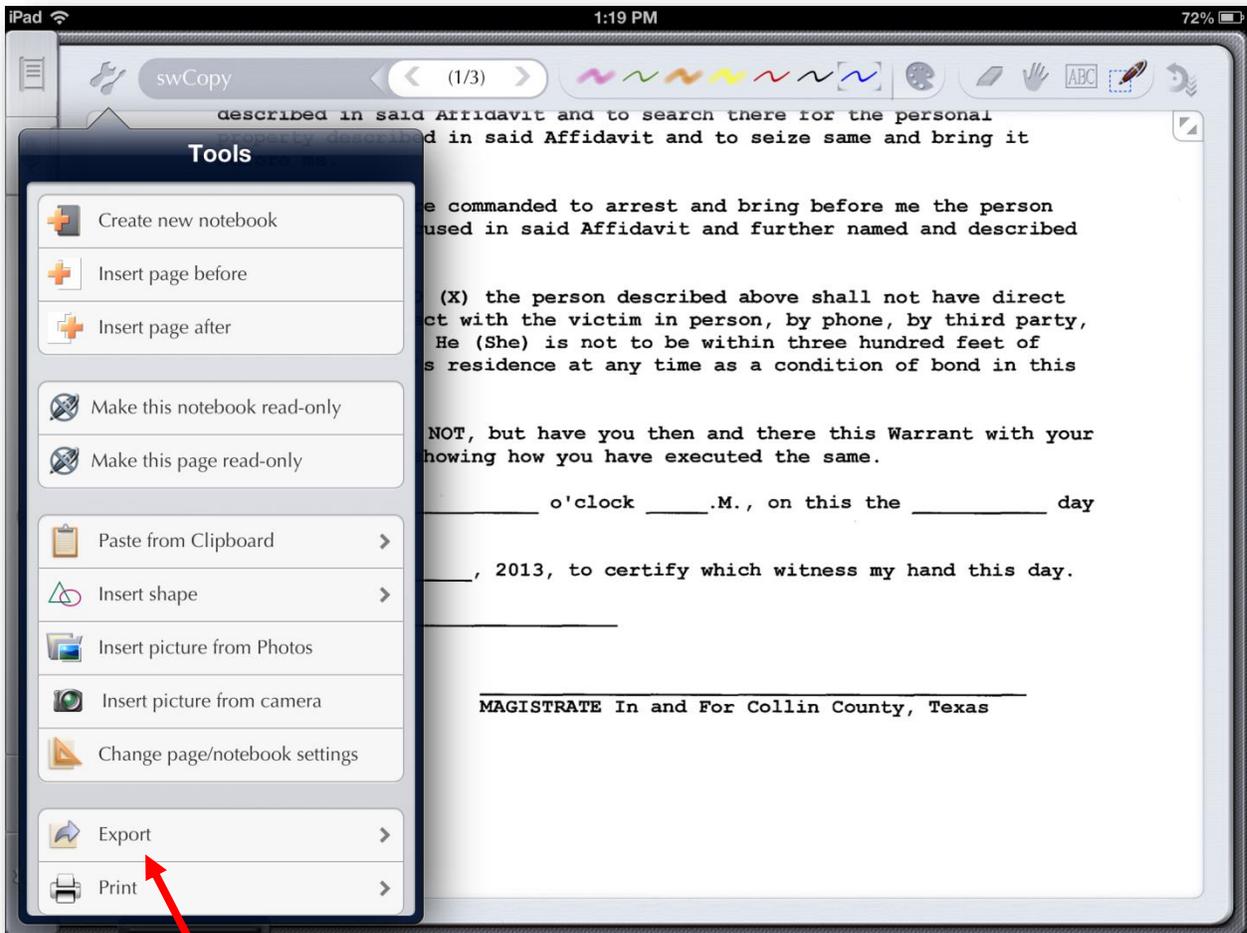
At this point the rectangle is showing you where your writing will appear. You simply sign your name here and your signature will appear here .

Step 7: Getting the Signed Warrant back to the Officer

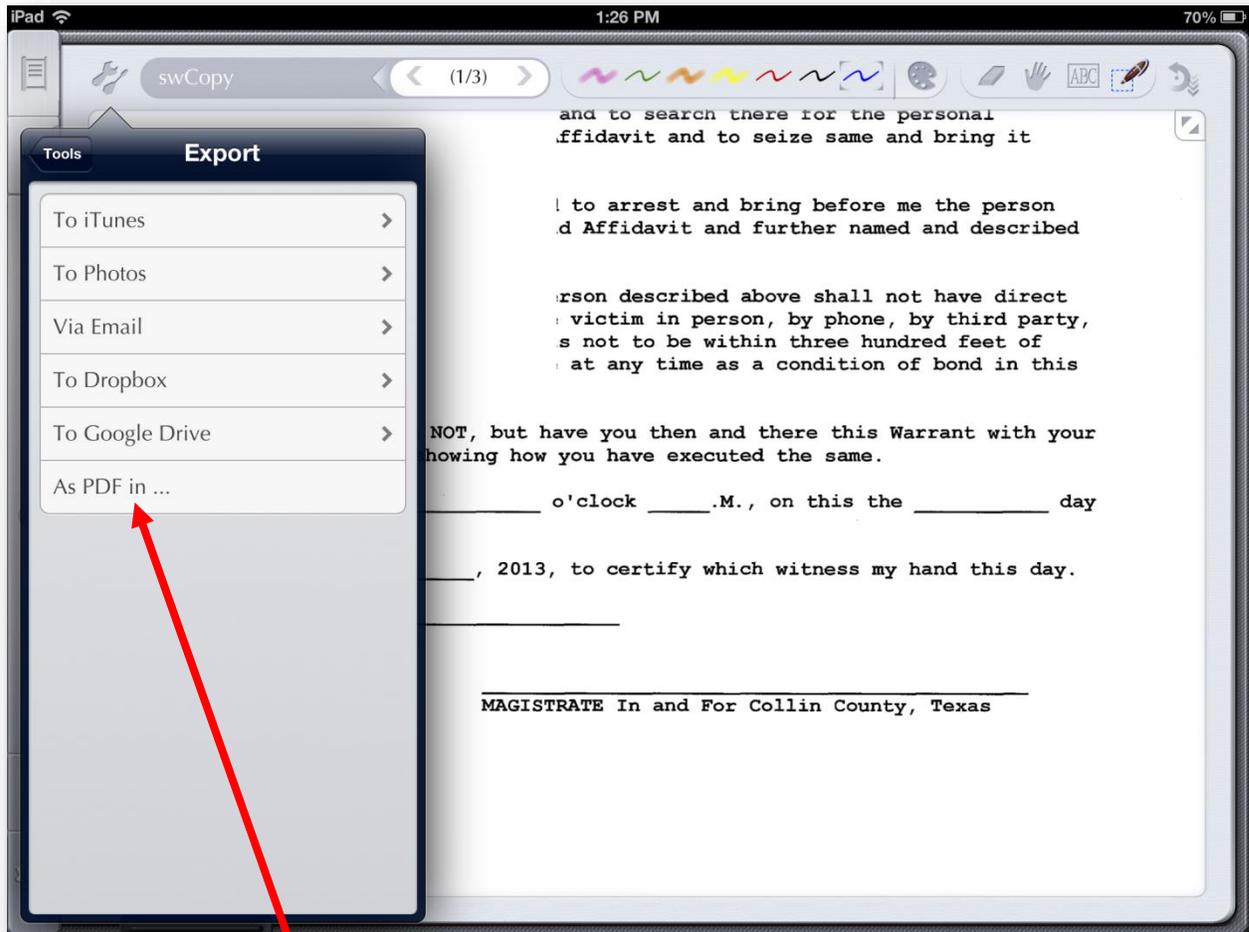
Once, you have signed it, you export the document back into Dropbox as a PDF in the "Signed" folder. You do so by tapping anywhere on the screen to close the "Closeup Box". Your screen at the top should then look like this again



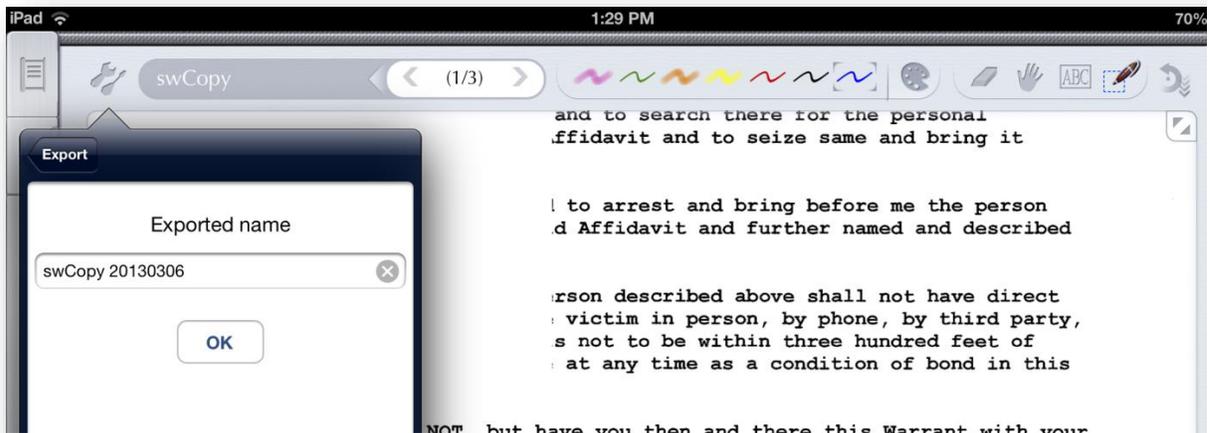
You'll need to tap the wrench and screwdriver icon here and your screen will drop down a menu that looks like this



You tap "Export" here and your screen will open a submenu like this



You then tap "As PDF in ..." and your screen opens another menu to look like this:



You can choose whatever filename you wish to give the file here. Tap "OK" and this menu will appear again.

he
them
I've



Except it will appear on the left hand side of your screen instead. One of the options will include Dropbox. Tap that icon . The officer should be able to see that on his computer at the other end. However, if cannot, you can call or text them to let know. The officer then opens the signed warrant and prints it out on their printer. ~~shown a sample below with all the items I was able to "write" through NotesPlus. (insert pic)~~



As you can imagine this process is not limited to just warrants. I have set up a shared folder with my court coordinator as well. When I am away from the office at a seminar, I can still sign orders if necessary. She simply scans the original order into the "To Be Signed" folder for "Orders". I then open it up on my iPad in NotesPlus, sign it and export it back for her to print at the office no matter where I am.⁷

This process may seem a little awkward at first. However, it really is quite easy once you do it a few times. It reduces paper, and increases my availability and productivity. I hope you find it helpful. Feel free to call me if you need someone to walk you through the set up and test it out with your court staff before contacting law enforcement about it. Good luck and may the Force be with you!

⁷ Technically I am limited by having an iPad that only works with wifi. However, wifi is so prevalent this is not really a limitation.

