

Report of Connecticut Judicial-Media Committee's Survey Subcommittee



*Recommendations Developed From
October 2007 Survey of Judges and
Journalists*



July 11, 2008

To Members of the Judicial-Media Committee:

Please find attached the recommendations developed by the Survey Subcommittee as a result of a survey distributed to judges and journalists by the Judicial-Media Committee in October 2007. As you know, the committee's goal in distributing the surveys was to help identify areas of concern or friction as well as areas where improvements might be made.

The Survey Subcommittee's first mission was to distribute the surveys and then tabulate the results for presentation in December to the full Judicial-Media Committee. We then turned to the task of developing recommendations based on the results. Over the past several months, members of the subcommittee met regularly and devoted countless hours to crafting the recommendations now in front of you. As co-chairs, we are extremely grateful to our colleagues on the subcommittee – Joseph D'Alesio, Paul Giguere, Patrick Sanders, Thomas Scheffey and Judge Carol Wolven, and to Judicial Branch staff liaison Rhonda Stearley-Hebert.

As you will see, we separated the recommendations into categories: facilities, public service, outreach and education, judicial/media relations, and judicial process. We hope that our recommendations address many of the concerns expressed by the judges and journalists who responded to the surveys. Additionally, we believe that these recommendations are in harmony with the strategic plan developed by the Public Service & Trust Commission.

We look forward to your input on these recommendations and would encourage you to contact us with any suggestions that you may have before the full committee submits final recommendations to Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers.

Very truly yours,



The Hon. Barbara Bailey Jongbloed
Judge of the Superior Court
Co-chair, Survey Subcommittee



Karen Florin
Courts Reporter, The Day
Co-chair, Survey Subcommittee

Recommendations From October 2007 Surveys of Judges & Journalists
As Presented to the Judicial-Media Committee on July 14, 2008,
by the Survey Subcommittee

As referenced in the Survey Subcommittee's cover letter, the subcommittee developed a series of recommendations stemming from its review of the surveys distributed in October 2007 to judges and journalists. A total of 22 recommendations are included. They are grouped by categories: facilities, public service, outreach & education, judicial/media relations, and judicial process.

A. Facilities

1. Study courtroom acoustics and audio systems and make improvements to ensure that everyone in the courtroom can hear the proceedings.
2. Study ways to adapt current sound systems to provide the media with adequate audio feeds, while protecting participants' ability to have off-the-record, confidential conversations.
3. New construction of courthouses should provide accommodations for the media. For existing facilities, accommodations should be made available to the media, where feasible.

B. Public Service

1. The Superior Court Operations Division should continue its training of courthouse staff. This subcommittee should review the curriculum used for the training on a yearly basis.
2. Develop a public service/customer service incentive for clerks and other front-line employees. Encourage clerks to greet public immediately. Provide backup when lines form in clerk's office. Provide a way for public to praise/complain about the service. Every effort should be made on the media's part to inform the clerk's office beforehand that they are interested in a case.
3. Create a vehicle for feedback and/or suggestions from judges, judicial employees, the media and the public.
4. The cost of copies produced by the clerk's office should be reduced.
5. Audio recordings of court monitors should be available at cost.

C. Outreach & Education

1. Expand the “frequently asked questions” section of web site and Judicial publications for media. Include sealing policies and procedures, information on availability of court exhibits and a section explaining the typical contents of a court file.
2. The Law School for Journalists should continue. Yearly informational sessions also should be provided by the Judicial Branch for members of the media who are interested in learning about how courthouses function generally.
 - a. External Affairs and court staff should make themselves available to new court beat reporters to provide basic information.
 - b. Expand the Judicial Branch’s Speaker’s Bureau to include judges willing to speak at media organizations.
3. Conduct a panel presentation of media members and judges at the Judges’ Institute relating to the media on the following topics:
 - a. Decision-making concerning editorials;
 - b. Degree of reliability required before publishing investigative articles;
 - c. Decision-making concerning value/need for video coverage;
 - d. Discussion among judges who have had experience having cameras in the courtroom and members of the media;
 - e. Discussion of the pros and cons of “off-the-record” interviews with members of the media.
4. Create opportunities for clerks and other staff to meet with media to learn about their respective jobs and priorities, including tours of courts and news organizations.
5. The *Guide to Court Information* should be updated. Ensure that the *Guide to Court Information* contains a compilation of statutes and Practice Book rules relating to media coverage in the courthouse, including discretionary matters on which judges may differ and rules pertaining to Juvenile Court.
6. The Branch should consider promulgating suggested guidelines for judges as to procedure to follow when:
 - a. contacted by media;
 - b. media coverage inaccurate/unfair.
7. Designate mentors for both judges and media members to consult when issues regarding media in the courthouse arise.

D. Judicial/Media Relations

1. Clerk's office supervisory personnel should receive more extensive /detailed training regarding media issues.
2. Educate and inform judges about potential resources, such as External Affairs and/or the Fire Brigade.
3. The role of the Fire Brigade should be re-evaluated.
4. Clerks should consult judge on a file's availability for public/media review when the judge has the file. Encourage the judge to make available a portion of the file, such as the complaint and latest pleading.
5. Provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue between judges and journalists.

E. Judicial Process

1. The Rules Committee should promulgate rules for the audio recording of court proceedings by members of the public.
2. Review practices regarding sealing of documents, with an emphasis on openness and accountability.