

PEP Advisory Committee Meeting
September 21, 2023
2:00 PM-In Person

Attendance: Jill Davies; Kari Adamsons; Doug Edwards; Judge Leo Diana; Joseph DiTunno; Mimi Donagan; Wanda Huertas (staff member); Michael Werner (Steven Hernandez designee); Natasha Barrett (staff member). No members of the public observed the meeting.

Regrets: William Brown and Steven Hernandez

Meeting called to order at 2:15 p.m.

1. Agenda, Parenting Education Program statistics and PEP research materials were distributed to committee members.

2. Membership-new 2-year term

PEP Advisory Committee membership has begun in September 2023. Judge Diana will take the place of Judge Albis on the Advisory Committee. Judge Diana introduced himself to the committee.

3. PEP statistics-January to August, referrals and virtual classes

Parenting Education Program Statistics from 2022 and 2023 were distributed to the committee members and discussed. To date, there are 2,907 participants who completed the Program. There has been an eight percent increase of PEP completers from 2022 to 2023. Most participants are completing the program in-person versus virtually. From January 2023 to August 2023, there were 2,125 participants who completed the program in-person and 782 participants who completed the program virtually. The 33% virtual rule has not been met. Multiple agencies have abandoned the virtual classes due to the ratio. The virtual classes have more attendees on average than the in-person classes.

Joseph DiTunno reported that providers are concerned about low enrollment/low referrals, and they may not be able to sustain the Program.

It was discussed that historically, parties were not able to divorce or go to final judgment in Family Court unless they completed PEP; however, in recent years, parties are divorcing and going to final judgment without taking the PEP class. Judge Diana reported that 92% of parties divorced with an agreement; however, 70% of the parties did not complete PEP.

Judge Diana suggesting the following as possible options:

- Any parties who file a post-judgment motion cannot file a motion unless PEP has been completed if not already completed.
- Enforce PEP completion with a sixty-day compliance date.
- Make PEP a requirement similar to the military affidavit form.

Joseph DiTunno suggested that Family Services can also follow up with parents to ensure that they complete the Program.

4. PEP Research Presentation

Natasha Barrett did a presentation on her research on Parenting Education Program nationwide. She found that most Parenting Education Programs nationwide are providing classes in-person. It appears that New Hampshire has a similar program to Connecticut. There was discussion if Connecticut should return to all in-person classes which has always been the standard practice. Offer virtual classes during inclement weather. Offer in-person and virtual classes for non-English speaking clients. After reviewing the stats and the research conducted, it appears that PEP numbers are low due to parents are divorcing and going to final judgment without completing PEP.

5. PEP Provider Focus Group

There was discussion on holding PEP provider focus groups in January to discuss referrals, low enrollment and class platform (virtual, in-person).

6. May 2023 Provider Training (Pathways and Fatherhood CFI)

- Joseph DiTunno did a presentation on the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative Program and Family Court's new court process-Pathways.
- Linda Blozie from Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence did a presentation on coercive control.
- The training was well received. There were approximately 60 providers/facilitators at the training.
- The committee was pleased with the training topics and attendance. They suggested possible training topic for next year: How to effectively facilitate a Psycho-education program.

Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.