

**Connecticut Judicial Branch
Commission on Access to Justice
Self-represented Parties Subcommittee**

November 14, 2011

1:00p.m.

1. Judge Raymond R. Norko, Chair of the Self-represented Parties Subcommittee called the meeting to order at 1:10p.m. with the following members in attendance: Hon. Elliot Solomon, Attorney Faith Arkin, Ms. Sandra Lugo-Gines and Ms. Krista Hess.
2. The subcommittee discussed their charge and agreed that developing a guide for Judicial Branch court staff to help them understand and work with self-represented parties was the subcommittee's first priority. The subcommittee has examined the existing manuals that have been created by other states, namely Massachusetts, North Dakota, Maryland, Arizona, Texas and Michigan. The subcommittee will also review and consider the manual that has been developed for Court Service Center staff. At the next subcommittee meeting, the members will report out on their review of the other state's manuals (including the Court Service Center manual) and make preliminary findings as to which features/components should be included in the guide developed for Connecticut.
3. The subcommittee also discussed some of the existing resources that are available to self-represented parties, including the law libraries video information series which guides self-represented parties through the completion of such forms as the Appearance (JD-CL-12), Fee Waiver for Family Matters (JD-FM-75) and the steps to respond to a civil lawsuit. Attorney Faith Arkin, Director of Judge Support Services will report back to the subcommittee on the list of topics where self-represented parties seem to request the most assistance. Attorney Arkin will also try to locate the information on a speaker who spoke about issues surrounding self-represented parties at the Judge's Institute a few years ago. The suggestion was made to create a section of the electronic bench book that specifically addresses the issue of judges dealing with self-represented parties. The subcommittee agreed that there are many diverging views amongst judges regarding how to appropriately handle parties who come before the court representing themselves and some defining language in the bench book might be helpful.

The subcommittee continued its discussion of the charge and suggested that a toll-free telephone number be created that parties can use to contact identified Court Service Center staff to ask questions and receive assistance. The subcommittee agreed that many self-represented parties may not be able to physically go to a court location or may not be able to afford the cost of a long-distance call. A toll-free number would enable parties to obtain the necessary assistance without incurring costs or creating any hardship. The subcommittee also discussed how staffing and budgetary constraints in the law libraries, Court Service Centers and throughout the Judicial Branch will adversely impact the subcommittee's ability to reasonably implement some of the recommendations. However, the members agreed that it was

still their charge to make recommendations in the interest of access to justice despite the fiscal limitations.

Next, the subcommittee discussed *Turner v. Rogers* and the implications it has on the role of judges in dealing with self-represented parties.

Judge Norko suggested that the subcommittee ask Judicial Branch Legal Services to issue a short summary of *Turner* for the Commission and eventually for distribution to the judges through the Chief Court Administrator's Office.

4. The next meeting of the Self-represented Parties subcommittee will be on Monday, January 23, 2012 at 1:00p.m. at 225 Spring Street, 4th Floor, Room 4B, Wethersfield.
5. The subcommittee meeting was adjourned at 1:55p.m.