

Minutes

Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission

25 June 2012

2:00

225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut

The Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission met on Monday, June 25, 2012 in the fourth floor conference room at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Committee members in attendance: Judge Raymond R. Norko (Chair), Atty. Faith P. Arkin, Ms. Heather Collins, Ms. Ann Doherty, Deputy Atty. Gen. Nora R. Dannehy, Atty. Jeffrey Dowd, Ms. Jennifer Ensign, Atty. Steven D. Eppler-Epstein, Atty. Johanna Greenfield, Atty. Barry C. Hawkins, Ms. Rhonda Stearley-Hebert, Ms. Krista Hess, Atty. Susan Nofi-Bendici, Ms. Roberta Palmer, Dean Jeremy R. Paul, Ms. Yanira Rodriguez, Atty. Susan O. Storey, and Atty. Herman Woodard Jr.

Also present: Atty. Daniel Horwitch.

Members absent: The Hon. William H. Bright Jr., Ms. Aileen Keays, Ms. Sandra Lugo-Gines, Atty. Mark Nordstrom, State's Atty. John M. Russotto, and the Hon. Elliot N. Solomon.

The meeting was called to order at 2:10 p.m. by Judge Norko.

- I. Judge Norko welcomed the members of the Commission and noted that a new member has been added since the Commission's last meeting, Ms. Heather Collins of Superior Court Operations.
- II. The Commission reviewed and members who were present at the meeting of April 23d approved those minutes.
- III. Discussion of Subcommittee Recommendations:
 - [Subcommittee on Legal Aid/Civil Representation](#): Atty. Steve Eppler-Epstein reported on the progress, over the last 12 months, of improving civil representation over the last year, including: the creation of new pro bono assistance programs and projects; the passage and implementation of increased court fees that will provide steady funding of several million dollars annually for legal aid providers; the expansion of the Branch's Volunteer Attorney programs; and the revision of Practice Book rules that will allow in-house corporate counsel to

participate in pro bono work under the supervision and with the support of legal aid agencies. For the coming year, the Subcommittee recommends that the Branch: continue its partnership with others to support improvements in legal aid funding; support new ways in which pro bono legal services can be expanded; continue to monitor the progress of establishing limited scope representation, and for the study of issues surrounding the provision of legal aid to those who cannot afford counsel.

- Next, the [Subcommittee on the American Bar Association and Technology and Access to Justice](#) Chair Atty. Woodard reported on behalf of the members, who reviewed the Subcommittee's original charge and recommend that the Branch: continue to develop and expand new and innovative ways to use technology to increase access to justice, including the use of social media; conduct an in-depth study of how videoconferencing is used by other states for pro bono work and develop a set of concrete recommendations regarding the same; consider conducting an assessment of the best tools available to provide information to people with low or no literacy skills to navigate the judicial system; continue to stay abreast of the latest trends from around the country on innovative and best practices in providing access to justice; and adopt the Subcommittee's recommendations on the creation of a single, comprehensive access to justice webpage and consider utilizing ADA accessible features on new web Judicial Branch webpages.

- [Subcommittee on Criminal Issues and Child Protection](#): Atty. Storey discussed the subcommittee's continued concerns about collateral consequences for self-represented parties in certain proceedings. The Subcommittee recommends also that: the Branch consider or study the feasibility of providing limited computer access to incarcerated defendants; allow attorneys and clients to provide or exchange confidential paper-based information; improve the physical layout of lockups; provide training and education for Judicial Branch staff on working to understand the barriers faced by incarcerated individuals to participate in certain proceedings involving their children and the collateral consequences of conviction. There was substantial discussion on the recommendations, including safety concerns for the public, Judicial Marshals and others; the cost factor involved in facility modification; and the role of the Branch in providing certain information.

- [Subcommittee on Self-represented Parties](#): Ms. Hess reported that the Subcommittee recommends: the development of a guide for Branch staff to assist them in working with self-represented parties (legal information, not legal advice); create additional tools and web resources such as videos, in English and other languages, aimed at assisting self-reps on how to file certain paperwork; establish a toll-free number that self-represented parties can use to speak with a Court Service Center professional; and continue to grow and expand the Branch's Volunteer Attorney programs and Volunteer Information Officer program.

IV. Member discussion of Commission charge and overall recommendations: The Commission, after discussion of the charge and the efforts over the last year, recommends: supporting an extension of the fee increases beyond their proposed sunset date; that new training avenues be developed to support pro bono efforts, including on-site training and the utilization of videoconferencing training; continue

as available training for local public library staff on how to assist patrons who seeks online information about the Judicial Branch; that avenues should be developed to utilize law school students to facilitate information sharing in Court Service Centers; that information exchanges between the Branch's Limited English Proficiency Committee and statewide legal aid providers should be conducted; that the Branch consider using federal accessibility standards when designing new and/or modified web pages; that it will continue to research and develop additional recommendations to increase access to justice; that the Branch should adopt the recommendations of the Commission on the development of a single ATJ webpage on the Branch's site.

- V. There was discussion about the Commission's next steps. It was agreed that Ms. Collins, who also serves as this Commission's support staff person, will develop a draft annual plan containing the Commission and Subcommittees' recommendations. The draft will be circulated to the members for discussion at the next meeting, to be held in September. The Commission will vote then on the concrete, articulated recommendations. It is anticipated that the report will be ready to present to Chief Justice Rogers and the Office of the Chief Court Administrator, in the fall.
- VI. The next meeting will be held in Conference Room 4B at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, CT, at a date and time to be announced. Judge Norko thanked the members and the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:45 p.m.