

**MINUTES**  
**Connecticut Judicial Branch**  
**Access to Justice Commission**  
**December 4, 2020**  
**11:00 a.m.**  
**Convened Through Microsoft Teams**

The Access to Justice Commission met virtually on Friday, December 4, 2020 utilizing Microsoft Teams.

**Members in attendance:** Justice Maria A. Kahn, Judge Bright, Deputy Dean Muneer I. Ahmad, Dean Jennifer Brown, Atty. Janice J. Chiaretto, Assistant Dean Karen DeMeola, Atty. Tais Ericson, Atty. Jennifer Ferrante, Ms. Krista Hess, Ms. Dawn LaValle, Atty. Chris R. Nelson, Atty. Moy N. Ogilvie, Atty. James P. Sexton

**Also in attendance:** Judge Elizabeth Bozzuto, Atty. Jeffrey Dowd

- I. **Welcome:** Justice Kahn welcomed Commission members and guests to the virtual meeting.
- II. **Review/Approval of the Draft Minutes from the June 4, 2020 meeting:** The draft minutes for the June 4, 2020 meeting were approved.
- III. **Discuss Workgroup Challenges Experienced and Innovations Implemented in Response to COVID-19**
  - A. **Workgroup on Libraries and ATJ:** Ms. Krista Hess reported the workgroup has concentrated efforts on the 30 second public service announcement (PSA) which will make library patrons aware of the resources available through the courts. Due to the health pandemic and the need to maintain social distancing, recording the PSA has not occurred yet. Ms. Hess reported that the workgroup is exploring ways to adapt the existing in person Hands-On Legal Research for Public Librarians into a virtual format. The workgroup has begun working on ways to offer online resources in several areas such as divorces, domestic violence, employee rights and COVID, evictions, foreclosures, poverty issues, and small claims. Prior to the pandemic, Ms. Hess indicated the workgroup discussed creation of a "Legal Corner" within public libraries. This legal services center would contain computers and legal resources for the public to access. In addition, Ms. Hess reported the workgroup is pursuing development of a speaker's program where public librarians can request that a Judicial Branch employee speak on a variety of topics including court service centers, volunteer attorney programs; and other subjects.
  - B. **Workgroup on Modest and Moderate Means and ATJ:** Atty. Chris Nelson reported on the workgroup's efforts to assess how attorneys are dealing with clients that may not have the benefit of access to technology. The workgroup spoke with the legal

incubators' Executive Directors to receive insight on how they have dealt with these challenges since they share many of the same clients. The groups brainstormed way to overcome these hurdles. The workgroup met with the co-chairs of the Libraries and ATJ workgroup to try and conduct a pilot program in a public library. The initiative would allow clients to go to a public library and have access to Microsoft Teams to participate in court hearings. Judge Diana reported about a program involving collaborative divorce including one by the Children's Law Center of Connecticut (CLCC). CLCC's program provides parties with a more civil, private and healthy way to get divorced without the legal costs associated with the traditional adversarial process. The workgroup will invite the CLCC to a future meeting to discuss the program. Atty. Jen Ferrante provided an update on their third cohort which began in January. They did not receive a lot of applications however those received were of high quality. More experienced attorneys applied rather than recent graduates.

- C. **Workgroup on Law Schools:** Dean Karen DeMeola reported that the CT Community Law Center (CCLC) doors were shuttered in March 2020. Attorneys were able to transition to remote work and virtual court appearances. Although there were challenges, some benefits were reported including lower costs of representation since attorneys no longer needed to spend half a day in court in person. Also, most clients no longer needed to take a full day off from work. UConn was able to create additional space for in-house clinics. Most clients did not need to come on site but office space was created for clients who wanted to take advantage of technology. UConn is looking to have in-person classes in the Spring. The Law School is looking to bring the CCLC back in some form but it would require the University to lift its guidelines.

Dean Jennifer Brown reported that Quinnipiac University (QU) moved to remote classes in mid-March. The university opened in mid-August with a hybrid on site and remote learning model. The clinic remains busy but offsite meetings with clients is required. One of the clinicians was active in the class action coalition of lawyers and the law clinic who represent individuals incarcerated at FIC Danbury. The objective was to push for a review of the medically vulnerable prisoners for release to home confinement. QU is close to launching a program in collaboration with the CT Department of Housing using a grant funded by the CARES Act. Students will be providing mediation services in homelessness prevention.

Dean Muneer Ahmad reported that Yale also has a strict no visitors policy. The University approved the clinic to conduct certain meetings however prior approval must be obtained. Significantly less meetings have been conducted since the beginning of the semester. iPads with cellular service have been lent to clients who do not have access to technology. They have been quite limited in their ability to meet with incarcerated clients. There is a huge premium on increasing access through video conferencing and having the ability to conduct confidential communications with incarcerated individuals. Dean Ahmad reported the work of the Housing and Foreclosure Clinic continues. The Community and Economic Clinic

has spun off into the Small Business in Time of Crisis Clinic. The clinic has focused on supporting small businesses, in particular, minority businesses.

- D. **Workgroup on General Pro Bono:** Atty. Ogilvie reported the workgroup recognizes there is an increase demand for pro bono services and a higher need for attorneys. Attorneys are working remotely making it difficult to meet clients in person in offices. The workgroup will be focusing on this issue and the challenges of obtaining pro bono attorneys in light of COVID. Some of the working group members are on the CBA Pro Bono committee and have circulated an email with a link to CBA Connect. CBA Connect provides an avenue for lawyers to be connected to conduct pro bono work. The workgroup will partner with the CBA to spread the word about CBA Connect.
- E. **Workgroup on Appellate Pro Bono:** Atty. Sexton reported the workgroup discussed ways to approach a pro bono appellate program. Specifically, how to identify cases where getting a pro bono or low bono attorney involved may be useful. Once identified, the workgroup discussed how the court may get a pro bono attorney involved. Considerations include identifying available attorneys who are open to accepting these cases. Additionally, consideration will be given to the process given the different stages of an appellate case. The workgroup discussed starting small, for instance, attorneys may be involved with drafting supplemental briefs rather than taking on the entire appeal. Rules changes may be needed in order to implement these ideas.
- F. **Workgroup on Video-Conferencing and ATJ:** Ms. Hess reported the workgroup was created many years ago and has accomplished many of the goals it was established to meet. It was created to try and increase the form of interaction between the Bar, self-represented parties and the courts. For instance, instead of bringing everyone into court, the idea arose to establish video conferencing. It progressed slowly and was being used actively in a couple courts. However, use of the technology never went anywhere until now. At a future meeting, Ms. Hess may suggest the video conferencing work group be morphed into a remote justice working group that takes all of the initiatives and contemplates all the different platforms the Branch is now using to administer business.
- IV. **Measures Undertaken by the Judicial Branch:** Judge Bozzuto provided an update on some of the measures the Branch has pursued since the June meeting. The Branch has further expanded virtual courts across all divisions. “Remote rooms”, also referred to as kiosks, are being created. These are designated physical rooms within each of the Judicial Districts that are equipped with technology that litigants can use. Judge Bozzuto expressed thanks to Atty. James Sexton for his role in implementing electronic exhibit submissions in civil and family matters. An online dispute resolution system for motor vehicle infractions has been developed which allows individuals to enter a not guilty plea electronically. Through the

program, a prosecutor can make an offer which can be accepted and paid for online eliminating the need to appear in the courthouse. An online dispute resolution pilot program for newly filed small claims cases was rolled out in the New Britain and Fairfield Judicial Districts helping to eliminate the backlog in one the Judicial Branch's highest area of backlog. A Superior Court Call Center was established and is currently answering calls for 8 Judicial District Clerk's offices. The centralized approach to answering calls allows Clerk's office staff more time to focus on the court's core functions.

- V. **ABA National Meeting of State Access to Justice:** Justice Kahn attended the ABA national meeting of the state Access to Justice Commission co-chairs. The focus of this year's conference was the ATJ movement and where is it going in 2020 and beyond. The conference addressed ATJ in light of disasters, such as COVID and natural and man-made disasters. Another focus was racial justice and how does it intersect with ATJ. There were several plenary sessions including subjects such as the urgency of now; the role of ATJ Commissions in confronting racism to advance civil justice; and one on civil legal aid funding in a time of COVID 19. The conference included various table talks as well. Links to session recordings will be distributed after today's meeting.
- VI. **Other Efforts / New Items:** The Bar Association and the CT Bar Foundation created a program to address racial justice called Constance Baker Motley Speaker Series on Racial Inequality. A link to the program will be sent after today's meeting. The group has conducted been several programs thus far including prisons and incarceration; racial justice and financial dealings; education; and access to voting.
- Shubi Deoras, Director of the national ATJ organization, created a new racial justice work group. Justice Kahn is co-chairing the group with Judge Mark Juhas from California. Several states have already joined the work group. There will be a series of programs, probably quarterly that will be shared once scheduled. The first meeting will be convened in early January 2021.
- VII. **Schedule Next Meeting:** The next Access to Justice Commission meeting is scheduled for March 11, 2021 at 2:00 p.m. using Microsoft Teams.
- VIII. **Adjourn:** The meeting adjourned at 1:02 p.m.