

Draft Minutes  
Committee on Expectations of the Public  
Meeting of Co-chairs and Subcommittee Chairs  
February 10, 2009

The Co-chairs and Subcommittee Chairs of the Committee on Expectations of the Public met at 225 Spring St., Wethersfield, CT in Room 204 on February 10, 2009.

In attendance: Hon. James Abrams (co-chair), Hon. Robert Beach (co-chair), Hon. James Bentivegna, Hon. Mark Gould, Atty. Charisse Hutton, Atty. Stacey Manware, and Hon. Robin Pavia.

The meeting was called to order at 2:38 PM by Judge Abrams.

1. Review and approval of the Minutes of December 10, 2008 – Motion approved unanimously
2. Reports from Subcommittees

Criminal/Motor Vehicle – Judge Pavia reported out on the work of this subcommittee, which has met twice. The subcommittee is preparing a pamphlet to assist people coming to court in connection with the motor vehicle infractions and violations. Although a great deal of information is on the website, people do not know how to access it. Providing people with information on paying for fines, for example, would allow them to finish their business on the same day that they come to court. In addition to the website, the letter that goes out from the clerk's office to a person who pleads "not guilty" could provide substantially more information on expectations to the public. Some systems changes were discussed, including developing the capability in the system for clerks to accept payment for tickets from different geographical areas in a single location as a way to avoid multiple appearances for people. Discussion ensued as to other systems changes that could help in handling the problems presented in courts by license suspensions, infractions, ticketing and the transfer of cases. In addition to the pamphlet and the letter, the subcommittee had also discussed the development of a video as a means of providing information to the public. The work of the subcommittee should be finished by the end of March.

Housing – Judge Bentivegna reported on the work of this subcommittee, which has also met twice. Housing court has many self-represented parties. Again, although information is online, but people who need the information cannot access it. The subcommittee focused on budget-neutral ideas in its discussions. A "Dear Litigants" letter has been drafted and it would be provided in English or in Spanish to defendants when they come to file an appearance and to others when they come to court as well. It will provide information on what to expect in the housing court. The subcommittee has also drafted language to be included in the court notice regarding language assistance and the consequences of not appearing at court on the date of the hearing. An advisement/greeting is also being drafted to provide litigants with an idea of what the day at housing court will be like. It will include a reminder to litigants about remaining in the court until their case is resolved. Both the language in the court notice and the reminder in the advisement are intended to reduce the number of defaults of defendants that occur in the housing court. The subcommittee will also be recommending improved signage. The work of this subcommittee should be completed by the beginning of March.

Juvenile – Judge Gould reported on the work of this subcommittee, which has also met twice. Some members of the subcommittee visited a juvenile court to see it from the perspective of an outside person coming to the court with a child in tow in order to identify what a person would need or look for when they got to court. Subcommittee members have proposed several ideas, including putting together a public transportation schedule to be available at the courthouse, drafting frequently asked questions for distribution at the courthouse and

posting on the website, and considering having a courthouse greeter. The frequently asked question would provide basic information on courtroom etiquette/conduct, what to expect in your day at the courthouse, and information on the layout of the building. The work of the subcommittee should be completed by the end of March.

SES/Family – Atty. Hutton reported out on this subcommittee, which has also met twice. The subcommittee is working on a number of products and recommendations, including a script for a video that would be available online and in the courthouse for litigants in a family case; another video script addressing family support magistrate court; and a palm card with a bulleted summary of the advisement of rights that is read in family support magistrate court. Members of the subcommittee have also reviewed the website and Judicial Branch publications in the area of family and are drafting recommendations on improving the navigation, links, and available information on the website for family issues, and updating and improving specific publications that currently are available as well as suggesting additional publications. The work of the subcommittee should be completed by the end of March, depending upon the advice of the co-chairs on what the subcommittee should produce.

Small Claims – Atty. Manware reported out on this subcommittee, which has met three times. The subcommittee identified two areas where if we improved information provided it would greatly enhance the experience of the public: first, what a litigant can expect once they get to the small claims hearing and second, what getting a judgment for or against a party means. The subcommittee is drafting a notice that would go out with the hearing notices. It discusses basic information, including getting into the courthouse, how to address the court, etc. The subcommittee is also reviewing and revising the directions and parking information that is provided on the notice of hearing, and reworking the notice of hearing to make it more accessible to the litigants. With respect to the second area, the subcommittee is drafting a notice that would be included with the judgment notice and would provide information on the post-judgment process.

3. Discussion of reports – It was noted that each of the subcommittees identified similar issues, including the availability of information online, but the idea that the information is not being used; the need to provide information to people prior to their arrival at court in a simple, short format; the importance of providing information in more than one language; the benefits of having a greeter at the courthouse; and a way to simplify people's interaction with the courts and reduce the number of times they must return to court. The co-chairs spoke of the need to stay within the fairly narrow charge of the committee: what does the public expect and how can we deliver on those expectations. It is important to remember that this project is an ongoing one. Some of the broader ideas, for example, systems changes to the motor vehicle system, may have to wait until another phase. Our objective is to concentrate on completing the things that are within the charge of the committee.

A discussion ensued as to ways to distribute to the public the material that is being drafted. Not everyone has access to the Internet or even to a computer. Materials distributed only at the court would be given to people too late to prepare them for the day at court. It was suggested that materials be provided at libraries, police stations or even schools. Some other suggestions distribution were sharing materials with statewide legal services, the State of Connecticut Infoline, and the state libraries and enlisting their assistance in getting the materials to the public.

4. Future Meetings – The subcommittee reports will include a summary of the subcommittees work as well as the drafts of pamphlets, letters or other products. The subcommittee reports and drafts should be sent to staff by March 27<sup>th</sup>. The full committee will meet on April 7, 2009 in Room 4 B, 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield.

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 PM.