

MINUTES
PROBLEM SOLVING IN FAMILY MATTERS COMMITTEE
MARCH 23, 2009

The Problem Solving in Family Matters Committee of the Implementation Plan met in Courtroom 4B at 400 Grand Street, Waterbury, CT.

Those in attendance: Hon. Lynda B. Munro, (Chair), Chief Family Support Magistrate Sandra Sosnoff Baird, Mr. Andrew Clark, Family Support Magistrate John E. Colella, Mr. Brian Coco, Attorney Joseph Del Ciampo, Mr. John Dillon, Mr. Joseph DiTunno, Ms. Barbara Geller, Mr. Joseph Greelish, Ms. Michelle Hayward, Atty. Charisse E. Hutton, Mr. David M. Iaccarino, Ms. Debra Kulak, Family Support Magistrate Linda T. Wihbey, and Mr. Edgar Young.

In addition, Krista Hess and Priscilla Arroyo from the Court Service Centers attended the entire meeting.

The meeting was called to order by Judge Munro at 9:00 a.m.

As a preliminary matter, the individuals in the room all introduced themselves.

1- Approval of minutes

The minutes from the last meeting held on February 23, 2009 were approved by the committee.

2- Overview of the Court Service Centers

Krista Hess, Priscilla Arroyo, Barbara Clark and James Lawlor from the Court Service Centers/Public Information all participated in this overview. Ms. Hess introduced the conceptual background of the Court Service Centers followed by an explanation of the day-to-day operations of the Court Service Centers by Ms. Arroyo. Ms. Clark provided the Committee with a brief handout regarding the services the Public Information Desk in Waterbury provides and does not provide.

There are two Judicial Districts that do not currently have a Center. The Centers are most commonly staffed by one person. It was reported that over 260,000 self-represented litigants were assisted in 2008. Attorneys are using the Centers more and more.

The changing dynamic in the Court Service Centers was discussed. For example, support and foreclosure matters are both very common matters Court Service Center personnel are handling right now. A large percentage of the Center traffic in New Britain is child support related.

The Centers keep data on each person who visits, including whether the visitor is self-represented, an attorney or "other" (such as DSS); what information the visitor was looking for (e.g., a form or a procedure); the language the visitor speaks; what kind of case or program they are involved in, and other information.

The Court Service Center personnel believe that they hear and see a lot of things that other court personnel do not. The environment is different (e.g., no glass barrier) and they can have long-term interactions with some of the litigants, sometimes over a period of many years. Because Center personnel do not have the responsibilities of the clerk's office, they are able to focus directly on the litigant. It was discussed that perhaps a focus group with Court Service Center personnel might be helpful for this Committee.

Specifically with regard to Family Support Magistrate court litigants, they are interacting with both the custodial and noncustodial parents. The hardest part for the Center

personnel is keeping up with what services are available. When asked what they need the answer was liaisons/contacts. Because Center personnel cannot go out into the community, they need the resources to come to them.

3- Progress Update - Work Group 1 Identification, Assessment, and Recommendations

Magistrate Wihbey reported out on the activities of Work Group 1.

Having identified certain issues, they are now looking for participation from the Department of Labor, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Department of Social Services and the Fatherhood Initiative.

Magistrate Wihbey reviewed the five barriers identified at the last meeting and shared specific discussions of the Work Group related to those including the identification of programs at the Department of Correction (DOC); information regarding housing for convicted felons; information regarding services for personal issues; how to hook up a link to the resumption of social security or State benefits when someone is released from a correctional facility; computer access for employment purposes, and a host of other topics.

They plan to ultimately make recommendations as to how to deliver those services. They may also make a recommendation regarding the definition of “presumption of indigency” although it was discussed that it may be the executive branch (DSS) that will need to provide the clarification.

It was suggested that perhaps ultimately, if there were any kind of master database, it would make sense for it to have a “bare-bones” statewide framework, with the specifics on a more local level (such as by Judicial District or region). There would also need to be some kind of “gatekeeper” and/or someone to keep the information in the database updated.

The Work Group still has work to accomplish and they are also considering having a custodial party representative, a children’s representative and a former inmate representative. It was agreed that it is important that the needs of all parties be addressed, not just noncustodial parties.

4- Progress Update – Work Group 2 Overlap

Mr. Iaccarino reviewed the charge of Work Group 2 to identify overlap and to strategize methods of reaching the population. A chart and a diagram created by Joseph Greelish was distributed to the Committee.

The Work Group brainstormed regarding the agencies involved and the interrelationships among them. A report was then created regarding the relevant systems. This report contains the primary data elements; which ones are most useful to the Judicial Authority; which agencies have access; and any agreements that allow access or whether there is no such existing agreement.

Mr. Iaccarino cautioned the Committee that it needs to be mindful of the principles of the IV-D program and that the federal government does not reimburse for activities that are not part of the child support program. This caveat, however, would not be applicable to the judges.

Judicial's Legal Services cautioned the Work Group to be mindful of information that cannot be exchanged. Areas to continue to look at include what barriers to the information exchange exist, and whether statutory or Practice Book recommendations should be made—however, it was noted that Work Group 2 would need to know what information Work Group 1 believes is needed.

Magistrate Sosnoff Baird expressed that Probate should be specifically included and Attorney Bennett will be contacted.

5- New Business – any other background work required

Attorney Del Ciampo expressed concern regarding managing HIPAA requirements with some of the information involved. Information from DHMAS was specifically pointed out as an issue although releases could be signed. The Assistant Attorney General who handles these matters for DSS and DMHAS was indicated as the appropriate contact on this issue.

6- Timeline and future meetings

The committee agreed to meet on Monday, May 18, 2009 in Courtroom 4B at 400 Grand Street, Waterbury, CT at 9:00 a.m.

The Work Groups will meet in the interim and after the next meeting the Committee will work on the synthesis of the information from both groups.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.