

Minutes
Connecticut Judicial Branch
Access to Justice Commission
January 9, 2025

The Access to Justice Commission met on January 9, 2025. The meeting was hybrid with members attending in person in room 4B at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut and members attending remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Members in attendance: Chief Judge William H. Bright, Jr. (Chair); Judge Karen DeMeola; Judge Christine Perra Rapillo; Judge Walter Spader; Judge Elizabeth Stewart; Judge Cecil Thomas; Attorney Jamey Bell; Attorney Tanya Bovee; Attorney Jan Chiaretto; Attorney Travis Claxton; Mr. Patrick Deak; Attorney Tais Ericson; Dean Brian Gallini; Attorney Edward Heath; Ms. Krista Hess; Ms. Claudia Beth Jalowka; Ms. Dawn LaValle; Ms. Sandra LugoGines; Attorney Benjamin Nissim; Attorney Moy Ogilvie; Professor Rachel Reeves; Attorney Rose Ann Rush; Attorney James T. Shearin; Attorney Jennifer Shukla

Absent: Deputy Dean Fiona Doherty; Ms. Alejandra Donath

Also in attendance was Ms. Nicole Collins from the Judicial Branch's Court Operation Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 2:04 PM by Judge Bright

I. Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Judge DeMeola and seconded by Attorney Jennifer Shukla to approve the minutes from the meeting on October 3, 2024. The motion passed by a 24-0 vote with two members absent.

II. Presentation on Licensure Reform Work

Dean Brian Gallini provided the members of the Commission with a presentation on how Attorney Licensure Reform Work could assist in improving access to justice. The presentation consisted of various statistics regarding the bar exam and how it has transformed throughout the years. The presentation contained information regarding the cost of the bar exam, which has increased significantly, how the scoring in each state differs, and how the number of individuals taking the bar exam has declined.

Dean Gallini proposed that states consider opportunities for licensure other than the bar exam. In states such as Arizona, Oregon, and South Dakota, there are programs that focus on post-graduation experiential learning with a provisional law license, followed by a review of the licensee's work product to determine whether a full license should be granted. In all of those states, admission through passage of the bar exam is still the primary path to licensure.

Dean Gallini proposed that this Commission work on creating such a pathway in Connecticut that would provide provisional licenses to law school graduates interested

in working in the public sector for a certain number of years. Their work during this period would be subject to rigorous review by the bar examining committee, which would determine whether the licensee should be granted a full license to practice law. Dean Gallini believes that such a pathway could encourage more graduates to pursue careers in public service, which would assist in improving access to justice.

Judge Bright inquired if Dean Gallini was aware of the Daniel Webster Scholar program at the Franklin Pierce Law School at the University of New Hampshire, and if he could elaborate on the program. The program provides individuals with a specific curriculum that includes a variant of the New Hampshire bar exam, which the students take during their last two years of law school. They are then sworn into the New Hampshire bar the day before graduation and are eligible to apply for admission to the bar of other states. Dean Gallini reported that results have been great with law firms from around the country interested in recruiting Daniel Webster scholars.

Attorney Jan Chiaretto stated that Dean Gallini's proposal for Connecticut is a great way to encourage individuals to work for non-profit organizations. She was curious though as to how law firms would view such admittees who did not take the bar exam. The law firm members of the commission who responded thought that there would be likely no differentiation between such admittees and traditional admittees, and that the experience gained through the experiential track might actually be an advantage.

Attorney Tanya Bovee inquired if there are any studies addressing the relationship of performance on the bar exam and the quality of performance as an attorney. Dean Gallini responded that there was not much data, but according to a Bloomberg survey, employers reported disappointment that smart, talented new law school graduates were not ready to practice law despite having performed well on the bar exam.

Judge Bright asked members of the Commission to let him know if they are interested in further discussing licensure reform. If there is a sufficient interest, a small ad hoc working group could be formed.

III. Updates from Subcommittees

Judge Bright asked the Chairs of each subcommittee to provide an update.

a. Pro Bono Subcommittee

Judge Stewart reported that the Subcommittee has met twice since the last Access to Justice Commission meeting. Judge Stewart stated that the subcommittee has discussed both the demand and supply sides of Pro Bono work. The demand aspect will be put on hold until the Connecticut Bar Foundation has completed its needs assessment report. As for the supply aspect, the subcommittee has created two working groups. The first working group will focus on a one stop website for those looking for pro bono assistance, attorneys, and paraprofessionals. The website will show what opportunities there are to provide or to receive pro bono assistance. The second working group will conduct listening tours and interviews, primarily with law firms and in-house departments throughout the state. The listening tours will involve

the working group interviewing and surveying lawyers and paraprofessionals who may be interested in volunteering for pro bono work. The groups will work separately and then report back to the subcommittee as a whole.

b. Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee

Judge DeMeola reported that the Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee is considering a pilot program focused on housing. The subcommittee will look at issues such as the knowledge gap, converting legal language to plain language, availability of court advocates, the technology gap, and bringing courts to communities where residences might have difficulty traveling to courts that are some distance away.

c. Legal Aid Subcommittee

Judge Thomas reported that the Legal Aid Subcommittee will be meeting with the Executive Director of the Connecticut Bar Foundation to present on three issues. Those three issues include the status of the Right to Counsel Programs, the state of the legal needs study, and the landscape of legal service in Connecticut. Judge Thomas stated that the subcommittee has researched geographical areas where legal aid services are not readily available, which will be discussed in greater detail at future meetings.

Judge Thomas would like to find ways in which to coordinate with the Pro Bono Subcommittee and the Self-Represented/Access Subcommittee to make sure that the Legal Aid Subcommittee is incorporating all perspectives of Access to Justice.

Judge Bright encouraged subcommittee members to participate in other subcommittees meetings if they are interested in doing so.

d. Law Libraries/Law School Subcommittee

At the request of Judge Spader, Chair of the Law Libraries/Law School Subcommittee, Nicole Collins provided an update to the members of the Commission. The subcommittee has been generating ideas and assessing needs about current services provided by the law schools and law libraries. The next meeting of the Law Libraries/Law School Subcommittee will consist of updates from the law librarians who are serving on the subcommittee.

IV. Overview of the National Meeting of State Access to Justice Commission Chairs

Judge Bright provided a summary of the National Meeting of State Access to Justice Commission. The meeting involved discussions on a multitude of issues including licensure reform work, non-lawyers serving on access to justice commissions, the benefits of a full-time Access to Justice staff person, and the unusually high default rates in debt collection cases.

Judge Bright stated that he hoped to discuss these topics at future Commission meetings.

V. Discussion of Future Access to Justice Conference

Judge Perra Rapillo, Chair of the Access to Justice Conference Planning Committee, reported that Her Honor, Judge Bright, Krista Hess and Nicole Collins met to discuss the initial steps of the planning committee. The preliminary thought is that the theme of the conference will be what has transpired in access issues since COVID-19 and what more can and should be done. The plan is to present newly developed initiatives at the conference in addition to discussing what efforts the Judicial Branch has undertaken on access to justice issues over the past five years. The goal is to hold the conference in the late Spring of 2026.

Judge Bright asked for all subcommittee Chairs and members to keep the conference in mind for any topics and/or any input that they may have.

VI. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Access to Justice Commission will be held on Thursday April 3, 2025 at 2:00 PM.

VII. Motion to Adjourn

Judge Thomas moved, and Judge DeMeola seconded, a motion to adjourn the meeting. The Committee approved the motion by 24-0 vote with two members absent. Judge Bright adjourned the meeting at 3:18 PM.