

Minutes

Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission

24 September 2012

1:30 p.m.

225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut

The Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission met on Monday, September 24, 2012 in the fourth floor conference room at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Committee members in attendance: Judge Raymond R. Norko (Chair), Atty. Thomas Chapman, Ms. Linda Cimino, Ms. Heather Collins, Ms. Ann Doherty, Atty. Jeffrey Dowd, Atty. Steven D. Eppler-Epstein, Ms. Krista Hess, Ms. Sandra Lugo-Gines, Atty. Susan Nofi-Bendici, Atty. Mark Nordstrom, Ms. Roberta Palmer, Ms. Yanira Rodriguez, State's Atty. John M. Russotto, Judge Elliot Solomon, and Chief Public Defender Susan O. Storey.

Also present: Atty. Daniel Horwitch.

Members absent: The Hon. William H. Bright Jr., Deputy Atty. General Nora Dannehy, Ms. Aileen Keays, Atty. Johanna Greenfield, Atty. Barry C. Hawkins, Ms. Rhonda Stearley-Hebert, Atty. Herman Woodard Jr.

The meeting was called to order at 1:40 p.m. by Judge Norko.

- I. Judge Norko welcomed the members of the Commission, and particularly welcomed two new members: Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services Director Linda J. Cimino, and Atty. Thomas P. Chapman, staff counsel at the Travelers. The Commission reviewed the minutes of the June 25, 2012 meeting and members who were present at that meeting approved those minutes.
- II. Discussion of the draft annual report to Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers: Judge Norko thanked the members for their work on the Commission and on the individual subcommittee reports. There was support for the content and style of the report by the members.
- III. Vote on report recommendations: The members approved the 16 recommendations that represent the Commission's work combined with three of the four subcommittees. The Commission approved the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Criminal Issues and Child Protection for further study. Ms. Cimino and Atty. Chapman abstained from the vote, as they were not involved in the development of the recommendations. The report will be presented to the Chief Justice in October and posted on the Commission's Web page.

IV. Roundtable discussion on the membership and future direction of the Commission:

- Judge Norko asked the members to report on any issues they have concerns about and the future direction of the Commission. Ms. Hess talked about the success of the Volunteer Attorney program operating in five judicial districts, with Hartford alone seeing some 1,800 people over the last 2.5 years. Ms. Palmer said that the program in a foreclosure court has been very successful, resulting in self-represented parties being much better prepared for foreclosure mediation. There was some discussion about whether people who utilize the program, which is staffed by pro bono attorneys, are also abusing it by repeatedly seeking free advice. There are currently no income guidelines and it appears that that will remain the case. Judge Norko said that it illustrates the need for the bar to embrace Rule changes that would allow limited scope representation; it would allow an individual to pay for certain attorney services while the attorney would have a limited appearance. There is a proposal that is being studied by the state Bar Association and has the support of the Judicial Branch.
- Attorney Nordstrom recently attended a conference in New York in which the New York Legal Assistance Group discussed the success of its [Mobile Legal Help Center van](#) which became operational in April. The 41-foot truck is staffed with legal aid attorneys who provide legal assistance to low-income individuals who have barriers to justice, including mobility issues, lack of child care, lack of transportation, etc. Atty. Eppler-Epstein said that Statewide Legal Services has conducted similar though not identical outreach to elderly people with civil legal needs but that a lack of resources makes a permanent program unworkable at the moment.
- It was noted that attorneys from the Robinson & Cole LLC law firm have been volunteering at the Middlesex Judicial District courthouse assisting people complete domestic violence-related court forms. Robinson & Cole is a participating member of the Pro Bono partnership which provides pro bono services to non-profits in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Atty. Nordstrom is the Chair of the Pro Bono Partnership.
- Atty. Russotto complimented Atty. Storey on the work of the Subcommittee on Civil Representation and Child Protection, which is particularly advocating for training for all justice partners on the collateral consequences of criminal convictions. Some convictions may result in the loss of qualification for student loans, subsidized housing and other government-sponsored programs including military service, even with a relatively minor conviction. Atty. Storey invited Atty. Russotto and the entire Commission to attend an October 17, 2012 training at Central Connecticut State University, Collateral Consequences of Arrest, Incarceration and Conviction. The forum is sponsored by the Division of Public Defender Services, CCSU, and the Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association. The forum will include discussions on housing, employment, immigration, education, public benefits.
- Atty. Chapman told the members that the Travelers is quite interested in encouraging its staff attorneys to get involved in pro bono projects. A Rules change that takes effect Jan. 1, 2013, will permit authorized house counsel to provide pro bono service under the supervision of a legal aid provider or a

state or local bar association project, or under the supervision of a Connecticut member of the bar who is also working on the project. Atty. Eppler-Epstein, who co-chairs the Commission's Pro Bono Subcommittee and is a member of the Branch's Pro Bono Committee chaired by Judge Bright, said the PB Committee is developing ways to "get the word out" to house counsel about their ability to do pro bono projects.

- The Commission has lost three members over the course of the last few months, representing the business community, law schools and the limited-English proficient community. In addition to replacing those members and adding Atty. Cimino and Atty. Chapman, it is very likely that additional representatives from various constituencies will be added in the future. The Commission will reconvene later in the fall.
- Ms. Collins will distribute electronic copies of the Commission report to all members and hard copies will also be made available after the report's acceptance by the Chief Justice.

V. A motion was made to adjourn at 2:35 p.m. and approved.