

Minutes
Connecticut Judicial Branch
Access to Justice Commission
October 3, 2024

The Access to Justice Commission met on October 3, 2024. The meeting was hybrid with most members attending in person in room 4B at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut and a few 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; Deputy Dean Fiona Doherty; Ms. Alejandra Donath; Attorney Tais Ericson; Dean Brian Gallini; Attorney Edward Heath; Ms. Krista Hess; Ms. Claudia Beth Jalowka; Ms. Dawn LaValle; Attorney Benjamin Nissim; Professor Rachel Reeves; Attorney Rose Ann Rush; Attorney James T. Shearin; Attorney Jennifer Shukla

Absent: Mr. Patrick Deak; Ms. Sandra LugoGines; Attorney Moy Ogilvie

Also in attendance was Mr. Zach Zarnow, Deputy Managing Director of the Access to Justice at the National Center for State Courts and Ms. Nicole Collins from the Judicial Branch's Court Operations Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 2:06 PM.

I. Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Judge Spader and seconded by Jennifer Shukla to approve the minutes from the meeting on July 9, 2024. The motion passed by a 23-0 vote with three members absent.

II. NCSC Access to Justice Resources

Judge Bright welcomed Zach Zarnow, who is the Deputy Managing Director of the Access to Justice team at the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). Zach was requested by Judge Bright to provide information regarding the programs that have been implemented by his team and the resources that are available to states through the NCSC.

The NCSC has taken on a wide variety of initiatives when it comes to access to justice. The programs Zach discussed include reforming court websites to group information that suits the individual and needs of the person searching for information, conducting forms camps to assist states in making forms more user friendly with a greater focus on plain English, and digital assistance which includes online tools that contain legal information tailored to the individual. There is also the Eviction Diversion Initiative, which is a program to provide funding for participating courts to assist parties in

resolving such cases in ways that allow tenants to remain in their housing. There are currently 22 courts involved in the Eviction Diversion initiative.

Judge Bright inquired if a staff member from the National Center for State Courts could look at a courthouse and express what could be improved? Zach responded with an affirmative and stated that if anyone has any questions and/or concerns to contact him.

Regarding the National Center for State Courts Committee on Legal Education and Admissions Reform Committee (CLEAR), Dean Brian Gallini of Quinnipiac Law School inquired if there will be any efforts to see what parts of the bar exam are not working? Zach responded that NCSC is still conducting its listening tour to obtain feedback from various stakeholders and no decisions have been made yet regarding recommended changes to the legal education or bar admission process.

III. Discussion of Subcommittees

Judge Bright asked the Chairs of each subcommittee to provide a brief report on their initial meetings.

a. Pro Bono Subcommittee

Judge Stewart, Chair of the Pro Bono Subcommittee began the meeting by asking members to share their connection with pro bono work. Figuring out what work is currently being provided will help build the discussion of what pro bono initiatives are and are not working.

The members of the subcommittee identified three items that can further the discussion regarding the scope of the subcommittee.

First, what is the demand for pro bono work?

Second, who needs the assistance of pro bono work?

Third, what pro bono opportunities are available for attorneys (private practice, in-house, etc.)?

Judge Bright made it clear to the Commission that the discussion surrounding how best to increase pro bono does not include a recommendation of mandatory pro bono.

b. Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee

Judge DeMeola, Chair of the Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee, shared that members began their meeting discussing the many obstacles that self-represented parties face when interacting with the court. Examples of these obstacles include physical access to the courthouse, difficulties in finding transportation, hours of courthouse operations, and the availability of information in languages other than English.

After discussing many of the obstacles, members then discussed ideas of how these issues could be overcome. There were suggestions such as, creating systems that travel, new tools at the public information desk, and amending forms so they are easier for individuals to understand. The subcommittee's focus will be to determine which possible solutions would be most effective and realistic in address the obstacles to access.

c. Law Libraries/Law Schools Subcommittee

Judge Spader, Chair of the Law Libraries/Law Schools Subcommittee, indicated that many of the subcommittee members communicate with the public and/or the clerk's office daily and therefore came to the meeting prepared to discuss recommendations. However, before going further with the recommendations, Judge Spader wanted the initial focus to be on figuring out the needs at the courthouses. The subcommittee will do further information gathering regarding what the specific needs are and how law libraries and law schools can help address them.

d. Legal Aid Subcommittee

Judge Thomas, Chair of the Legal Aid Subcommittee reported that the subcommittee's first initiative is to figure out what is already being provided for legal aid and to break it up into the geographical areas. It was discussed that when a patron is requesting legal assistance, they are mainly directed to Statewide Legal Services and therefore members were questioning on how inquiries were being collected. Subcommittee members discussed taking field trips to the different legal aid providers to see how cases are onboarded and handled.

Judge Thomas and Attorney Ariane Bailey, staff person to the Legal Aid Subcommittee, are currently in the process of collecting the data of the services that are already provided and will report back to the subcommittee.

IV. Discussion of Connecticut Bar Foundation legal needs assessment

Attorney Edward Heath provided an update on the Connecticut Bar Foundation's legal needs assessment. This assessment engages in collaborative data analysis to find recommendations on how the legal aid system can be improved in Connecticut.

V. Discussion of future Access to Justice Conference

Judge Bright encouraged members to start thinking about firm goals for the Commission and what projects will need to be undertaken to achieve those goals. One goal Judge Bright raised is to hold an Access to Justice Conference. The conference will be tentatively scheduled for Spring 2026 and there will be further discussion when an Access to Justice Conference committee is formed.

VI. Next Meeting

Judge Bright reported that the Commission will meet four times a year. Nicole Collins will be sending an email to the members of the Commission containing all four future meeting dates.

VII. Motion to Adjourn

Judge Perra Rapillo moves, and Judge Spader seconded, a motion to adjourn the meeting. The Commission approved the motion by a 23-0 vote with three members absent. Judge Bright adjourned the meeting at 3:03 PM.