

Minutes
Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission
14 November 2011
2:00
225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut

The Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission met on Monday, November 14, 2011 in the fourth floor conference room at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Committee members in attendance: Judge Raymond R. Norko (Chair), Atty. Faith P. Arkin, Deputy Atty. Gen. Nora R. Dannehy, Atty. Jeffrey Dowd, Ms. Jennifer Ensign, Atty. Steven D. Eppler-Epstein, Atty. Eric George, Atty. Johanna Greenfield, Atty. Barry C. Hawkins, Ms. Rhonda Stearley-Hebert, Ms. Krista Hess, Atty. Mark Nordstrom, State's Atty. John M. Russotto (for SA Kevin Kane), Ms. Aileen Keays, Ms. Sandra Lugo-Gines, Ms. Roberta Palmer, Dean Jeremy R. Paul, Ms. Yanira Rodriguez, Judge Elliot N. Solomon, Atty. Herman Woodard Jr.

Members absent: The Hon. William H. Bright Jr., Chief Public Defender Susan O. Storey

Also present: Atty. Joseph DelCiampo, Legal Services.

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Judge Norko.

- I. Judge Norko welcomed the members of the Commission.
- II. Introduction of new members: Judge Norko introduced three new members of the Commission: Atty. Dowd, who is a Supervising Law Librarian; Ms. Ensign, who is a Systems Developer with the Branch's IT Division; and Ms. Palmer, a Program Manager in Court Operations. Atty. Maureen Well retired from the Judicial Branch earlier this fall and resigned her membership on the Commission.
- III. Minutes: The minutes of the September 26, 2011 meeting were approved with minor typographical corrections.
- IV. Discussion of subcommittee assignments and meetings: Judge Norko noted that three of the Commission's four subcommittees, on Legal Aid/Civil Representation; Self-represented Parties; and the American Bar Association and Technology & Access to Justice met prior to the full Commission meeting. A roundtable discussion ensued with the Chairs of the three Subcommittee reporting to the members what their subcommittees discussed:

- Atty. Eppler-Epstein, Co-Chair (with Judge Bright) of the [Legal Aid/Civil Representation Subcom.](#), said the subcommittee discussed its Charge and the six recommended action steps. The members will prioritize the steps after considering a variety of information from many sources and likely make recommendations of their own. He also spoke about the recent Pro Bono Summit held at the Legislative Office Building and coordinated by the Branch's Pro Bono Committee. The event was extremely successful, with a 43-page catalog detailing pro bono opportunities for lawyers. The days also served as the unveiling of a [new website](#) for attorneys who wish to provide volunteer service: probono.ctlawhelp.org
- Atty. Woodard, Chair of the [ABA/Technology Subcommittee](#), said the members evaluated the charge and eight action steps. Ms. Stearley-Hebert reported to the subcommittee that the External Affairs Division earlier this year investigated the viability of usage of social media to increase access to justice and the information was presented to the Chief Justice and the Office of the Chief Court Administrator. Atty. Woodard also noted that the subcommittee will be considering action steps related to utilizing the Branch's online resources; analyzing those online resources and recommending ways to create an online "one-stop-shop" of accessible justice information by marshaling existing information; and gathering information on the ability/viability of increasing access to justice for people with hearing impairments through the use of hearing loops in courtrooms.
- Ms. Hess, a member of the [Self-represented Parties Subcommittee](#), reported that the other members have decided to initially focus on making recommendations to develop a handbook or guide, for Judicial Branch staff, that will detail the most effective ways of assisting self-represented parties in the court system. Judge Norko, who chairs the subcommittee, noted that there may be ramifications from the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Turner v. Rogers et. al.*, 131 S. Ct. 2507 (2011), that may impact the judicial authority with respect to adjudicating civil cases involving self-represented parties. He also noted the recent symposium on limited scope representation, at Quinnipiac University, which drew a variety of reactions from attorneys who attended. Judge Norko stated that limited scope representation, wherein an individual retains an attorney for only part of a case, such as drawing up documents, would need to be embraced by Judges, the legislature and the Rules Committee of the Superior Court before it could be implemented.
- Atty. Greenfield noted that the Subcommittee on [Criminal Issues & Child Protection](#) will meet on Wednesday, Nov. 16th. It is chaired by Atty. Storey, who was unable to attend today's meeting.

- V. Discussion of subcommittees: Atty. Eppler-Epstein shared with the Commission some facts about the funding struggle faced by the legal aid community, largely because of a collapsed housing market and record low interest rates. Where the Interest On Lawyer's Trust Accounts (IOLTA) generated in excess of \$20million in 2007, it was reduced to \$4million in 2010. Increases in certain court fees have provided some stopgap measure but the threat of having to reduce the size of legal aid organizations is a very real threat despite the needs for civil legal assistance by many thousands of poor or very low income Connecticut residents. Judge Norko noted that the *Turner* decision may have an impact on Connecticut and asked Atty. Del Ciampo, of the Branch's Legal Services Unit, to research the issue and report back with a one- or two-page synopsis. There was further discussion between the members on the limited availability of federal funds for justice programs, and the limitations placed on bodies accepting those funds. There was discussion on the U.S. Department of Justice's Access to Justice Initiative.
- VI. The Commission set its next meeting for Monday, January 23, 2012, at a time and location to be announced.
- VII. The meeting adjourned at 2:55 p.m.