

Minutes
Public Service and Trust Commission
Committee on Self-represented Parties
Subcommittee on Training
December 10, 2008

The Public Service and Trust Commission Committee on Self-represented Parties, Subcommittee on Training met via teleconference at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, CT in Room 133 on December 10, 2008.

Those in attendance: Hon. Jonathan E. Silbert (chair), Ms. Krista Hess, Atty. Susan Reeve, Hon. Mary E. Sommer, and Hon. Cynthia K. Swienton.

Judge Silbert called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m.

1. Subcommittee members reviewed the subcommittee charge to determine their scope of work. One aspect of the charge states the subcommittee will explore the “feasibility of creating and conducting educational workshops.” The subcommittee agreed that the use of the word “workshops” was limiting and they should explore other educational vehicles such as video tutorials that can be accessed via the Internet. The subcommittee further agreed to reference this expanded scope as “educational programs”. The subcommittee is aware of some video and print material that other state courts are using that may be useful.
2. The subcommittee members paid particular attention to the areas for consideration under their charge: 1) to determine which areas of the court system would most benefit from educational programs; 2) to examine the need to create training, instructional and “how-to” manuals for self-represented parties to assist them in navigating the court system; and 3) to determine the extent to which staff are trained on the psychology of dealing with frustrated self-represented parties.

To address the first area of consideration, the subcommittee will create a broad list of those areas of the court system that appear to face the most challenges with self-represented parties, and which might benefit most from educational programs. Some of those areas include the Judicial District clerk’s offices, particularly family, civil, housing, small claims and foreclosure mediation staff. The subcommittee also recognizes that Court Service Centers and Public Information Desks receive a high-volume of self-represented parties requiring assistance. The subcommittee agreed it should survey various clerks’ offices and other areas of the court to properly determine their greatest challenges, and that by doing so, the subcommittee will also receive feedback regarding their second area of consideration. Krista Hess will draft the appropriate surveys for the subcommittee’s review.

The Appellate Court clerks’ office provides self-represented parties with an introductory letter that informs self-represented parties on the requirements of representing themselves. The letter also provides information regarding what the clerks’ office can and cannot do in assisting them with their matter. The Appellate Court also provides a

Handbook of Connecticut Appellate Procedures for self-represented parties. The subcommittee agreed these tools may be useful in the Superior Court clerks' offices. The committee will investigate the feasibility of having a 'self-represented party' letter automatically generated by the court's computer system and mailed each time an appearance is filed by a party who is representing themselves. Judge Silbert will draft this letter and send to the subcommittee for comments.

Regarding the third area of consideration, the subcommittee agreed that staff should learn how to better deal with self-represented parties. This will include staff having a clear understanding of where information ends and legal advice begins, and how to reduce frustration for the staff member and self-represented party. It was suggested that staff training in empathy, compassion and understanding diverse cultures may be helpful. The subcommittee unanimously agreed that all staff should participate in this training, including judges, magistrates and marshals.

The next meeting of the Committee on Self-represented Parties, Subcommittee on Training will be on January 14, 2009 at 1:00 p.m. via teleconference at 225 Spring Street in Wethersfield, CT in Room 206.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.