

Minutes
Standing Committee on Guardians Ad Litem and Attorneys
for the Minor Child in Family Matters
October 4, 2017

The Standing Committee on Guardians Ad Litem and Attorneys for the Minor Child in Family Matters met in Courtroom 409 of the Hartford Judicial District Courthouse located at 95 Washington Street, Hartford, CT, on October 4, 2017.

Those in attendance: Judge Elizabeth Bozzuto (Chair); Ms. Liza Andrews, Policy Director, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Attorney Michael Cronin; Attorney Christine Perra Rapillo; Attorney Justine Rakich-Kelly

Those participating by telephone: Ms. Wendy Furniss, Branch Chief, Department of Public Health; Attorney Danielle S. Rado

Absent: Mr. Samuel S. Gray, Jr., President and CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford; Judge Edward Graziani

Also in attendance were Ms. Frances Wickstrom from the Child Protection Unit of the Division of Public Defender Services and Attorney Damon Goldstein from the Judicial Branch's Court Operations Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 9:38 AM by Judge Bozzuto.

I. Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was then made by Wendy Furniss and seconded by Michael Cronin to approve the minutes from the meeting held on July 25, 2017. The motion passed unanimously and the minutes were approved.

II. Report of the Training Subcommittee

A proposed 3-day training curriculum devised by the members of the Training Subcommittee was circulated among the members. In addition to the training curriculum for those who have not been previously trained, it is hoped that continuing education can be offered through the Division of Public Defender Services at no cost to individuals. There was a discussion among the members about additions to the proposed curriculum. One topic that was suggested was covering the interaction with the Family Services Office. Within that topic, it was proposed that the training cover other resources that are also available for families such as co-parenting counseling. This additional piece of the curriculum could be worked into the topics covered on Day 3. It was also suggested that the

topics of roadblocks and gate-keeping be added to the section on the “Role of the GAL”.

After the curriculum is finalized, the next step will be to find subject matter experts to conduct the training. Suggestions were made that potential faculty could come from local colleges and universities, parenting education providers, the DCF Training Academy, or from experts at other agencies. The Training Subcommittee will schedule a meeting to formalize a plan for faculty to conduct training and any other associated issues. The Subcommittee should be prepared to report back to the Committee at its next meeting. Ideally, a training for new GALs/AMCs would be offered in the late-Spring or early-Summer of 2018. Registration for the training would have to be posted approximately two months in advance.

III. Process for Removal of Individuals from List of Persons Qualified to Serve as a GAL/AMC

This item on the agenda was initially passed for a discussion of the process for annual review and approval of a list of individuals deemed eligible for appointment as a GAL/AMC. The Committee was in agreement that there should be independent bases by which the Committee could remove an individual from the list of persons qualified to serve as a GAL/AMC. Possible examples of these independent bases are failure to comply with Practice Book Rules 25-62 and 25-62A, failure to comply with the GAL/AMC Code of Conduct, repeated failure to accept cases, and the imposition of discipline by a professional licensing authority.

There was also a discussion of developing a complaint procedure by which a judge or an aggrieved individual could bring allegations to the attention of the Committee. The Committee agreed that a judge should be able to refer a GAL/AMC to the Committee for possible removal. It was also agreed that any final decision by a licensing agency or professional board that is adverse to an individual on list of persons qualified to serve should result in a referral to the Committee. There was also a discussion of creating a process that would not be duplicative of the referrals made by the court, a licensing agency, or a professional board whereby individuals could file a complaint with the Committee. The Committee discussed possible standards for bringing such a complaint. Individuals citing case specific issues would still need to bring them to the attention of a judge first. Michael Cronin offered to prepare draft guidelines for the process of removal to present at the next Committee meeting for further discussion.

Finally, the Committee discussed the possibility of having a procedure for temporary suspension from the list of persons eligible to serve in instances

where an arrest came to the attention of the Committee. A temporary suspension would potentially be used pending the final resolution of whatever led to an arrest. Another possible standard that could be used for a temporary suspension would be specific allegations of egregious conduct that was a threat to public safety and welfare. This will be discussed further as part of the larger discussion of removal from the list of persons qualified to serve as a GAL/AMC. Judge Bozzuto will invite Attorney Michael Bowler, Statewide Bar Counsel, to the next Committee meeting to assist the members in the discussion of a process for removal.

IV. Process for Annual Review and Approval of List of Individuals Deemed Eligible for Appointment as a GAL/AMC

Practice Book Section 25-61A(b)(4) requires the Committee to annually review and approve a list of individuals deemed eligible for appointment as a GAL/AMC in family matters. The members discussed how best to accomplish the review. It was suggested that notice be sent by email to all individuals currently eligible to serve as a GAL/AMC that an annual review will be conducted. The email would be sent and posted on the Judicial Branch website on or about November 15. The email would request each individual to certify that criteria in Practice Book Sections 25-62 and 25-62A have been met. As part of the review, it was also suggested that each individual holding a professional license would have their license status verified to make sure they are still in good standing. Individuals would have until December 15 to submit their compliance. Any individual who failed to submit their compliance would have their name removed from the list of individuals deemed eligible for appointment.

V. Schedule of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Standing Committee on Guardians Ad Litem and Attorneys for the Minor Child in Family Matters will be held on Wednesday December 6, 2017 at 9:30 am. The meeting will be held at a location to be determined. The next meeting of the Training Subcommittee will be held on Monday October 30, 2017 at 9:30 am. The meeting will be held at a location to be determined.

Judge Bozzuto adjourned the meeting at 10:43 AM.