

Minutes from Survey Subcommittee Meeting of March 31, 2008

Present: Judge Barbara Bailey Jongbloed, Ms. Karen Florin, Joseph D'Alesio, Paul Giguere, Thomas Scheffey, Judge Carol Wolven.

Absent: Rhonda Stearley-Hebert

Agenda Item No. 1: Judge Jongbloed welcomed the members of the subcommittee and informed the members that Thomas Scheffey of the Connecticut Law Tribune would be replacing Scott Brede on the subcommittee, and informed the subcommittee that Karen Florin would be replacing Scott Brede as co-chair.

Agenda Item No. 2: The subcommittee unanimously approved the minutes from its meeting on February 28, 2008.

Agenda Item No. 3: A discussion of proposed draft recommendations based upon the survey took place and the subcommittee agreed on the following recommendations:

1. The Court Operations Division should continue its training of courthouse staff. This subcommittee should review the curriculum used for the training on a yearly basis.
2. The Law School for Journalists should continue and a Journalist School for Judges should be a course at next year's Judges' Institute. (See Outreach and Education Recommendations.)
3. The Guide to Court Information should be updated along with the corresponding information on the Judicial Branch Web-site. (See Outreach and Education Recommendations.)
4. The role of the Fire Brigade could be expanded to include mobilizing the Fire Brigade when a judge is perceived to have been unfairly criticized/targeted or when a news agency has acted egregiously. Media members of the brigade could respond with their own story or could encourage their editorial board to tackle the issue.

The subcommittee grouped the following recommendations into five categories:

A. Facilities

1. Study courtroom acoustics and audio systems and make improvements to ensure that everyone in the room can hear the proceedings. The study should be conducted on a priority basis with priority given to older court facilities.

B. Public Service

1. Develop a public service/customer service incentive for clerks and other front-line employees. Encourage clerks to greet public immediately. Provide backup when lines form in clerk's office. Provide a way for public to praise/complain about the

service.

2. Encourage clerks to retrieve files from the courtroom soon after a case is called, perhaps at the next recess.
3. Provide clerks with FOI statutes. Instruct clerks that public/press usually does not, and should not have to, provide docket number when asking for a file.
4. Create an on-line forum for feedback/suggestions from judges, judicial employees and media.
5. Each court should prepare a contact list with names, phone numbers and titles of court staff. The list should be available to the public and media.
6. Reduce the price of copies produced at clerks' offices.

C. Outreach and Education

1. Expand the "frequently asked questions" section of Web-site and Judicial publications for media. Include sealing policies and procedures, information on availability of court exhibits and a section explaining the typical contents of a court file.
2. Yearly informational sessions should be conducted (primers) run by Judicial for media members interested in learning about how courthouses function generally. "Law School for Journalists."
3. Create opportunities for clerks, judges and other staff to meet with media to learn about news cycles and priorities. Media could provide facility tours and be available to explain news decisions.
4. Conduct a Panel Presentation of media members and judges at the Judges' Institute relating to the media:
 - a. decision making concerning editorials
 - b. degree of reliability required before publishing investigative article
 - c. decision making concerning value/need for video coverage
 - d. discussion between judges with experience having cameras in the courtroom and media members
 - e. problems encountered re: cameras in the courtroom
5. Create a media booklet consisting of a compilation of statutes and practice book rules relating to media coverage in the courthouse, including discretionary matters on which judges may differ, rules pertaining to Juvenile Court, etc.
6. Promulgate suggested guidelines for judges as to procedure to follow when:

- a. contacted by media
 - b. media coverage inaccurate/unfair
7. Designate “mentors” for both judges and media members to consult when issues regarding media in the courthouse arise. “Go To” people.

D. Judicial/Media Relations

1. Appoint Media Liaison in each courthouse.
2. Ask clerks to consult judge on a file’s availability for public/media review when the judge has the file. Encourage the judge to make available a portion of the file, such as the initial complaint and the latest pleading.
3. Provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue between judges and journalists. The Law School for Journalists was an excellent start.
4. External Affairs and court staff could reach out to new court beat reporters to provide basic information and let the reporters know they are available.
5. Administrative Judges and editorial boards could meet informally for off-the-record discussions about court access issues and current events. Beat reporters should be invited to participate in meetings.
6. Educate and inform judges on the role of External Affairs.

E. Judicial Process

1. Create a committee to study/improve access to juvenile proceedings before new law is implemented (in 2010?).
2. Review standards for sealing documents, particularly when a criminal investigation is “ongoing” for months or years.

Agenda Item No. 4: The subcommittee adjourned its meeting at 5:00 p.m.