

Minutes
Family Commission
January 27, 2010

The Family Commission met in room 607L at the Middlesex Judicial District Courthouse located at 1 Court Street, Middletown, CT on January 27, 2010.

Those in attendance: Hon. Lynda B. Munro (Chair), Hon. Jon M. Alander, Hon. John D. Boland, Attorney Steven Dembo, Hon. Anne C. Dranginis, Hon. Stephen Frazzini, Attorney Constance Frontis, Johanna Greenfield, Attorney Maureen Murphy, Attorney Thomas Parrino, Hon. Elliott N. Solomon.

Also in attendance were Attorney Joseph Del Ciampo and Attorney Nancy Porter from the Judicial Branch's Legal Services Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 PM by Judge Munro.

I. Review and approval of minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on November 4, 2009 were approved by the members of the Commission who were in attendance.

II. Brainstorming: Re-imagining the family docket

Judge Munro asked the Commission to brainstorm ideas, starting fresh, re-imagining the family docket without regard to cost, but assuming no increase in manpower. The ideas were captured on a flip chart as follows:

- Unified Family Court (Note: Security concerns were expressed)
- 2-week short calendar markings rather than 1-week
 - With an appointment system for Family Relations
 - Parties/attorneys meet before coming to court
- Individual calendar – a file is assigned to one judge and stays with that judge
 - Criteria would be needed
 - One possible method would be that the case could be assigned its judge when it needs its 1st hearing
 - All related family cases could also be with that judge
- Early identification of cases that need more judicial intervention
- A process whereby a request is submitted for a “complex” family docket

- More explicit/clear orders prior to judgment (the goal being to prevent post-judgment activity based on ambiguous orders)
- Re-examine the rotation of judges (the goal being to prevent the time needed for a new judge to become familiar with the case, particularly post-judgment) and/or identify cases that should remain with a particular judge after the judge's reassignment
- Increase the use of status conferences to define issues
- Allow a judge time for decisions to be written/issued when he or she has a certain number of cases to address prior to assigning that judge any new hearings/trials.
- Address issues revolving around people accompanying a litigant to court.
- Early screening of motions
- Individual or group scheduling of appointments with family relations prior to the hearing date.
- Use of telephone/conference calls for court business
- Docket for self-represented litigants (there was discussion with regard to whether the parties would opt in or whether it would be something that so many self-represented parties would choose, there would be no need for an opt-in process)
- Specific management of cases with fewer needs (e.g., where there are few assets)
- Utilize arbitration
- Where an agreement is reached on any given day, it can get before the court that day
- Morning and afternoon calendar times (e.g., 10 am and 2 pm) rather than all cases assigned for the morning
- Try cases straight through from beginning to end
- Same judge for protective and restraining orders involving the same parties
- Notification to the JD (family) of the issuance of a criminal protective order involving the same parties in a pending family case

A member of the public in attendance spoke on one occasion, and it was suggested that she send her ideas to the Chair of the Commission.

III. Such other matters that may come before the Commission

No other matters were addressed by the Commission at this meeting.

IV. Next Meeting

The next meeting is currently scheduled for March 10, 2010. The agenda will include the summary of ideas from this meeting and administrative divorce.

Judge Munro adjourned the meeting at 4:15 p.m.