

Minutes

Connecticut Judicial Branch

Access to Justice Commission

Subcommittee on Legal Aid/Civil Representation

December 20, 2011

2:00 pm.

**95 Washington Street, Courtroom 321
Hartford, Connecticut**

The Subcommittee on Legal Aid/Civil Representation met at 2:00 p.m. on December 20, 2011 in Courtroom 321 at 95 Washington Street, Hartford, CT.

Committee members in attendance: Judge William Bright, Co-chair, Attorney Steven Eppler-Epstein, Co-chair, Dean Jeremy Paul, and Roberta Palmer.

The meeting was called to order at 2:07 p.m. by Judge Bright.

The members began the meeting with a review of the subcommittee's charge and a discussion as to possible tasks which might be undertaken. The members agreed that the subcommittee's charge is very broad and may overlap with work already being done by committees and commissions appointed by the Chief Justice under the Judicial Branch's Strategic Plan.

The members agreed that the subcommittee must avoid making recommendations about topics or issues which may ultimately come before the court for a decision.

The subcommittee discussed what Connecticut's goal should be for civil representation in the courts and agreed that its starting premise could be the following: it is beneficial to litigants and the court system when low-income people have access to legal counsel as to all legal matters, and legal representation as to all substantial matters.

This led to a discussion about the current state of civil representation in the state and how the Judicial Branch could partner with other agencies to increase civil representation. The subcommittee members discussed the issue of modest means - those people that do not qualify for free legal advice but who may have limited means to pay for legal counsel. The subcommittee discussed the possibility of developing a model where people of modest means in need of representation could be directed to attorneys in need of work. A quick discussion about limited scope representation ensued. This led to the agreement among the subcommittee members that the goals for the subcommittee's work should

include increasing representation for those litigants of moderate means as well as low-income litigants.

After some discussion, the subcommittee agreed that the subcommittee's focus should not only be on ways to increase the number of people who have legal representation but also the quality of that representation. The subcommittee's recommendations should focus on the training that is provided to attorneys who provide civil representation through one of its programs. Those recommendations should also highlight the belief that legal representation helps the court process and does not slow it down.

The subcommittee went on to discuss the possibility of partnering with the University of Connecticut School of Law to offer an Access to Justice course next fall with the possibility of having a report drafted and submitted to the Judicial Branch at its end.

The subcommittee agreed to continue to explore the current methods of providing indigent civil representation within Connecticut with the goal of identifying gaps that may exist and outlining efforts underway in other states or nationally so as to make recommendations for reducing or closing those gaps.

The subcommittee's next meeting will be held on February 8, 2012 at 2:00 pm. in Courtroom 321 at 95 Washington Street, Hartford, CT.

The meeting adjourned at 3:25 pm.