

Draft Minutes

**Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission:
Subcommittee on the American Bar Association and Technology & Access to Justice
14 November, 2011
1:00
225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut**

The Subcommittee on the American Bar Association and Technology and Access to Justice met at 1:00 p.m. on November 14, 2011 in the fourth floor conference room at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Ct.

Committee members in attendance: Atty. Herman Woodard Jr., Chair; Atty. Jeffrey Dowd, Ms. Jennifer Ensign, Ms. Rhonda Stearley-Hebert and Ms. Sandra Lugo-Gines, who attended from 1:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Also present: Ms. Heather Collins, Support Staff.

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Attorney Woodard.

- I. Atty. Woodard welcomed the Subcommittee members and noted that Ms. Lugo-Gines is also a member of the Subcommittee on Self-represented Parties and would join this subcommittee at approximately 1:30 p.m. The other members introduced themselves and provided a brief description of their background and area of expertise.
- II. Review of the Charge: At Judge Norko's request, the Subcommittee has added an eight action step to its charge, "Examine the feasibility of increasing access to justice for people with hearing impairments through the use of "hearing loop" technology, considering its effectiveness, benefits and costs." Atty. Woodard then led the group in a discussion of the charge and the action steps. Ms. Stearley-Hebert, Communications Manager with the Branch's External Affairs Division, provided to the members information on the use of social media, i.e., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc., to connect to court users. The Division conducted an in-depth review of the feasibility and appropriate applicability of these applications to facilitate communication to the public, she said, and presented the information to Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers and the Judges of the Office of the Chief Court Administrator. While research remains ongoing as to the usefulness of social media, Ms. Stearley-Hebert said it appears somewhat likely that the Branch will develop a Twitter account to impart certain information, such as weather-related closings and delays. There was discussion of the use of Twitter to reach out to the Bar; at least two jurisdictions, Philadelphia and the state of California, use Twitter feeds to notify attorneys and the public of events or happenings. Currently, much of the Branch's public notice is done through its website, jud.ct.gov. Ms. Ensign, who is a web developer with the Branch's Information Technology Division, works primarily on the Branch's

website. She told the members that a complete re-design is underway and that the Branch has become its own internet service provider (ISP). Ms. Lugo-Gines discussed the importance of revising the Branch's website to accommodate people with disabilities. While there are currently federal standards in place for every federal agency, there are no such state standards at the moment. However, Ms. Lugo-Gines, the ADA Coordinator for the Superior Court Operations Division of the Branch, said that those standards, Section 508, are very likely going to apply to state governments in the future and the Branch should use or consider them during the redesign. Ms. Ensign stated that there has been a small project testing the 508 accessibility standards; the members discussed the option of recommending that the project be piloted to people with disabilities before it is expanded. There was further discussion on the charge and an action step related to videoconferencing in the Branch. During 2010, videoconferencing equipment and infrastructure were developed/installed with \$1.2 million in federal funds. Ms. Lugo-Gines said the technology has been requested by people with disabilities as an accommodation and approved by judges. The technology has been used by the Appellate Court, several Superior Courts, and the Court Support Services Division saving the Branch tens of thousands of dollars per year in saved transportation costs and staff time. The group continued their discussion on the charge, with Atty. Dowd, a Supervising Law Librarian in charge of several judicial districts, noting the usefulness of the Law Libraries webpage not only for the Bar, but for the public. The group discussed the idea of examining the various online options found on the Branch website and recommending a single "Access to Justice" page by grouping together topics, publications, etc. currently found scattered throughout the website. The members also discussed the addition to the charge, on hearing loop technology. One member is currently researching the compatibility of their hearing aids with this technology, which provides much clearer audio to people with certain types of hearing aids. There was a discussion of conducting an informal check of locations that are wired with a loop by volunteers with compatible hearing aids. That sparked a discussion by the members on what technologies are available to people with disabilities and whether that information is being conveyed to the members of the bar. In order to avoid duplication of efforts, each of the members will take control of providing information on action steps within their area of expertise.

- III. The members will convene prior to the next meeting of the full Access to Justice Commission, which is scheduled for late January 2012. No date was chosen but the meeting will be posted on the Subcommittee's [homepage](#).
- IV. Atty. Woodard adjourned the meeting shortly before 2:00 p.m.