

Minutes
Connecticut Judicial Branch
Access to Justice Commission
June 26, 2025

The Access to Justice Commission met on June 26, 2025. The meeting was hybrid with members attending in person in room 4B at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut and members attending remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Members in attendance: Justice William H. Bright, Jr. (Chair); Judge Christine Perra Rapillo; Judge Karen DeMeola; Judge Walter Spader; Judge Elizabeth Stewart; Judge Marshall Berger (retired); Attorney Jamey Bell; Attorney Tanya Bovee; Attorney Jan Chiaretto; Attorney Travis Claxton; Mr. Patrick Deak; Attorney Tais Ericson; Dean Brian Gallini; Ms. Krista Hess; Ms. Claudia Beth Jalowka; Ms. Dawn LaValle; Ms. Sandra LugoGines; Attorney Benjamin Nissim; Attorney Moy Ogilvie; Professor Rachel Reeves; Attorney Rose Ann Rush; Attorney James Shearin; Attorney Jennifer Shukla

Absent: Judge Cecil Thomas; Attorney Edward Heath; Deputy Dean Fiona Doherty; Ms. Alejandra Donath

Also in attendance was Attorney Damon Goldstein and Ms. Nicole Collins from the Judicial Branch's Court Operations Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 2:01 PM by Justice Bright.

I. Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Judge Spader and seconded by Attorney Jennifer Shukla to approve the minutes from the meeting on April 3, 2025. The motion passed by a 23-0 vote with four members absent.

II. Updates from Subcommittees

a. Pro Bono Subcommittee

Judge Stewart reported that the Pro Bono Subcommittee has formed two working groups. The first working group is focused on developing a new website or improving the existing pro bono websites for the "supply" side and "demand" side of pro bono. This effort includes increasing publicity and aims to help clients and providers know what opportunities and resources are available.

The second working group is conducting a listening tour to gather information from law firms, in-house counsel, and solo practitioners on what pro bono services they are already providing and what can be done to encourage attorneys to increase their pro bono work. The Subcommittee has conducted 2 sessions with representatives from larger firms so far and participation has been strong. Justice Bright and Judge Stewart mentioned that a number of the larger law firms have developed partnerships with more than one legal aid organization. The working group will be sharing what they have learned from the two listening sessions at the next Subcommittee meeting on June 30th.

Additional listening sessions are scheduled to take place in the fall with local/regional bar associations, in-house counsel, and others.

Judge Stewart additionally shared that as of January 1st, a new MCLE rule regarding pro bono work will go into effect. The rule states that for every 3 hours of pro bono work attorneys can earn 1 hour of MCLE credit up to a maximum of 6 hours.

Justice Bright stated that the participants in the listening session he attended were not aware of the ctprobono.org website, which was developed by Statewide Legal Services to serve as a clearinghouse for attorneys looking for pro bono opportunities. Both Justice Bright and Judge Stewart feel this could be due to the relationships larger firms have already built with certain legal aid providers.

Justice Bright concluded by inviting any Committee member who is interested in attending one of the local Fall listening sessions to let him or Judge Stewart know.

b. Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee

Judge DeMeola shared that the Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee has formed two working groups: one to develop an advocate and navigator program and the other to work on plain language in court documents and resources.

The advocate and navigator working group is looking at internal resources, such as online publications and videos. They will begin exploring ideas for developing videos, slide decks and flow charts to assist self-represented parties with understanding and navigating court procedures in housing court. Members of the working group have conducted research and believe that New York has many materials that may be helpful when identifying areas for improvement. Judge DeMeola also referenced Connecticut's Department of Housing Direct Rental Assistance Pilot Program. For the navigator program, members will begin by involving interns from the Experiential Learning Program to assist individuals in navigating through the courthouse, providing specific information about where things are located and directing them to helpful resources. There have also been changes in how the Mediation Specialists identify themselves in court. Travis Claxton stated that during the call of the housing docket, the mediators are now introducing themselves so tenants can easily distinguish the mediators from the landlord's attorney or other individuals in the courtroom.

The plain language working group is collaborating with the Legal Aid Subcommittee to review court forms.

Justice Bright shared that there have been prior discussions suggesting the creation of videos of the inside of each courthouse to help individuals navigate through the buildings upon arrival.

c. Law Libraries/Law Schools Subcommittee

Judge Spader shared that the Law Libraries/Law Schools Subcommittee has been focusing on self-represented parties who are visiting the courthouses for the first time

seeking to file an application for a Temporary Restraining Order or Civil Protection Order. Members of the Subcommittee are looking to identify students participating in the Quinnipiac and Yale restraining order programs held in New Haven to see who could serve as navigators to assist applicants and respondents with their cases. Judge Spader also discussed the possibility of creating a video for individuals looking for help with the restraining order process.

Justice Bright reminded the members of the Commission to include the public libraries as a resource in their discussions. Local libraries are often more accessible to the public than courthouses and can be a great venue for clinics. Ms. Dawn LaValle shared that the public libraries can serve as an aggregator and distributor of information by helping to disseminate materials to the public. She noted that the public libraries offer accessible resources, including books, content and PDFs. Previous Access to Justice working groups held information sessions to circulate materials and train librarians on the information available on the Branch's website, which library staff could use to assist and direct individuals looking for legal information.

d. Legal Aid Subcommittee

At the request of Judge Thomas, Chair of the Legal Aid Subcommittee, Nicole Collins provided a brief report to the members of the Commission.

The Subcommittee has developed four working groups, Pro Bono Academy, Pro Bono Training and MCLE, Eviction Diversion and Self-Guided Forms.

The first working group, the Pro Bono Academy, will be an annual half-day training event offering substantive training to attorneys in pro bono civil areas such as family, housing, and debt collection. The hope is to offer the first training session in Fall 2026.

The second working group, Pro Bono Training and MCLE, will begin by developing efforts to offer MCLE credit for Pro Bono representation. Members would develop and present a proposed change to the Rules of Professional Conduct to require training within the first one or two years of admission. (As noted by Judge Stewart, such a rule has been adopted.)

The third working group, Eviction Diversion, will be focusing on developing a model or pilot eviction diversion program. This program could work within the existing eviction diversion mediation program and would involve connecting parties to legal representation, rental assistance, helping with housing code enforcement, financial counseling, and other necessary supportive services.

The last working group, Self-Guided Forms, will be working with the Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee to explore the feasibility of implementing self-guided forms in Connecticut, and working to develop an initial set of forms that could be offered in a self-guided model for filings like writs of audita querela and financial affidavits in family matters.

III. Next Meeting

Justice Bright noted that at the next Commission meeting, there will be discussion regarding the proposal to amend the discovery rules in summary process matters and that the Branch is currently in the process of hiring an Access to Justice Coordinator he hopes will be available to attend the next meeting.

The next meeting of the Access to Justice Commission will be held on Wednesday October 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM.

IV. Motion to Adjourn

Judge Spader moved, and Judge Stewart seconded, a motion to adjourn the meeting. The Committee approved the motion by a 23-0 vote with four members absent. Justice Bright adjourned the meeting at 2:36 PM.