

Minutes
Connecticut Judicial Branch
Access to Justice Commission
October 1, 2025

The Access to Justice Commission met on October 1, 2025. The meeting was hybrid with members attending in person in room 4B at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut and members attending via Microsoft Teams.

Members in attendance: Justice William H. Bright, Jr. (Chair); Judge Christine Perra Rapillo; Judge Karen DeMeola; Judge Elizabeth Stewart; Judge Cecil Thomas; Judge Marshall Berger (retired); Attorney Jamey Bell; Attorney Shivangi Bhatia; Attorney Travis Claxton; Mr. Patrick Deak; Deputy Dean Fiona Doherty; Ms. Alejandra Donath; Attorney Tais Ericson; Attorney Sandra Fair; Dean Brian Gallini; Attorney Edward Heath; Ms. Krista Hess; Ms. Claudia Beth Jalowka; Attorney Song Kim; 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 Walter Spader; Attorney Tanya Bovee

Also in attendance was Attorney Giovanna Shay, Greater Hartford Legal Aid; Attorney William Pitt, Chief Clerk for Housing Matters; Attorney Rebecca Schmitt, Attorney Damon Goldstein and Ms. Nicole Collins from the Judicial Branch's Court Operations Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 2:03 PM by Justice Bright.

I. Introduction of our new ATJ Coordinator, Jennifer Shukla

Justice Bright introduced Attorney Jennifer Shukla, who will serve as the Judicial Branch's new Access to Justice Coordinator. Attorney Shukla previously represented the Connecticut Bar Association as a member of the Commission. Justice Bright then introduced Attorney Song Kim, who has assumed Attorney Shukla's role as Director of Access to Justice Initiatives at the Connecticut Bar Association.

Along with those introductions, Justice Bright introduced Attorney Shivangi Bhatia of Cowdery, Murphy & Healy, LLC, and Attorney Sandra Fair of Statewide Legal Services, who have joined the Commission.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Judge Stewart and seconded by Attorney Jamey Bell to approve the minutes from the meeting on June 26, 2025. The motion passed by a 26-0 vote with Judge Thomas abstaining and two members absent.

III. Proposal to Amend the Discovery Rules in Summary Process Matters

At the Commission's April 3rd meeting, members began discussing a proposal to amend the discovery rules in summary process matters. Justice Bright reminded everyone that the Rules Committee referred the proposal to the Access to Justice Commission to provide comments on whether it raises any access to justice concerns.

Since the April 3rd meeting, the legislature has passed an amendment to Connecticut General Statutes Section 47a-3a adding a new subsection (d), which requires the production of the landlord's rental ledger when requested by the tenant. There have been ongoing discussions between the legal aid providers, who proposed the rule changes, and Court Operations to better understand each side's concerns. The members of the Commission received a memo from the legal aid providers and a response from Court Operations outlining their respective positions.

The legal aid providers' proposal to the Rules Committee consists of two components. The first involves amendments to Sections 13-7 and 13-10 of the Practice Book, which would modify discovery timelines in residential summary process matters from sixty days to fifteen days. There were no concerns expressed by Court Operations, or by any members of the Commission, regarding this change.

The second component of the proposal is the introduction of a new Practice Book rule, Section 13-12B, which would require the disclosure of the most recent written lease and rent ledger. Attorney Giovanna Shay, representing Greater Hartford Legal Aid, stated that the legal service providers view this as an access to justice issue, noting that approximately 89% of tenants in summary process matters are self-represented. The proposal would allow tenants, who may be required to enter into a repayment agreement to be reinstated, an opportunity to request a copy of their landlord's rental ledger. Attorney Shay also noted that this proposed new rule was revised following Court Operation's response and that the legal aid providers are willing to continue working with Court Operations on the language.

Dean Brian Gallini inquired whether there would be any reason not to support the proposed new rule, Section 13-12B? Justice Bright responded that the concern is some landlords are self-represented and a mandatory disclosure requirement could slow down the process for all parties by creating difficulties for landlords who do not maintain complete records. It was also noted that if the requirement of having to disclose the rental ledger is not implemented as a rule, judges and housing specialists are still able to craft appropriate remedies on a case-by-case basis. Attorney Bill Pitt, who is the Chief Clerk for Housing, added that implementing the rule would limit judicial discretion and potentially delay proceedings for some parties.

In discussing the proposal among the members of the Commission, several members expressed support, acknowledging that these amendments are integral to advancing access to justice.

It is expected that a revised proposal will be presented to the Rules Committee. Once the revised proposal has been submitted, Justice Bright can convey to the Rules Committee that the Commission does see it as an access to justice issue. The Commission can also provide further input at that time if members wish to do so.

IV. Updates from the Subcommittees

a. Pro Bono Subcommittee

Judge Stewart reported that the Pro Bono Subcommittee is divided into two working groups. The first working group is conducting listening tours, which involves members meeting with attorneys across the state to identify effective strategies and challenges to encouraging pro bono participation. In late Spring, the working group conducted two sessions with multiple large law firms. The larger firms demonstrated well-organized

systems for pro bono intake and strong partnership models. On Wednesday October 8th, the listening tour working group will meet with ten attorneys who won the Connecticut Bar Association Pro Bono Award in recent years.

The second working group, which focuses on the websites offering content on both the “supply” and “demand” sides of pro bono, is currently awaiting the results of the legal needs assessment conducted by the Connecticut Bar Foundation.

b. Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee

Judge DeMeola reported that the Self-Represented/Access Issues Subcommittee is developing recommendations to assist self-represented individuals in housing court. Key initiatives include collaborating with Judge Thomas’s Legal Aid Subcommittee on plain language efforts, providing navigator programs when housing court is not in session, and creating educational materials such as slide decks and videos to guide individuals on the day of their hearing.

c. Law Libraries/Law Schools Subcommittee

No business was brought before the Commission.

d. Legal Aid Subcommittee

Judge Thomas reported that the Legal Aid Subcommittee has identified four priority areas and organized corresponding working groups. The first working group is focused on the concept of a Pro Bono Academy, which would be a half-day training course for new admittees to the bar. This Academy would offer participants the opportunity to select a pro bono path focused on areas of significant legal need.

The second working group is focused on pro bono training and a proposed MCLE rule change which would require new attorneys in their first year of practice to complete a certain number of training hours, particularly in areas of civil representation.

The third working group is focused on eviction diversion, with the goal of developing a model or pilot program. This effort will build upon the work of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and involve ongoing discussions with Court Operations. The Subcommittee is considering concepts that may be adapted for use in Connecticut housing matters and has identified several promising developments. Judge Thomas also noted that conversations have been initiated with mediators and the Department of Housing to further the concept.

The final working group, self-guided forms, will be modeling its approach on New York’s systems, which utilizes technology and query-based processes similar to Turbo Tax to provide guided walk-through forms for users.

Justice Bright reported that the Judicial Branch is in the process of developing a chat bot feature for its website.

V. Future Access to Justice Conference

Judge Rapillo reported that the Planning Committee for the Access to Justice Conference has met and determined that the conference will be held in Fall 2026, rather than Spring 2026. The Committee made this decision for two reasons: first, the Legislative Office Building, where the conference will take place, will have fewer conflicts; and second, the change allows the subcommittees additional time to finalize their conference topics.

VI. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Access to Justice Commission will be held on Wednesday November 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM.

VII. Motion to Adjourn

Attorney Jennifer Shukla moved, and Judge Cecil Thomas seconded, a motion to adjourn the meeting. The Commission approved the motion by a 27-0 vote with two members absent. Justice Bright adjourned the meeting at 2:56 PM.