

Minutes of the
Workgroup on Libraries & Access to Justice
2 o'clock p.m.
June 24, 2014
225 Spring Street, Room 4B
Wethersfield, CT

Members in attendance: Ms. Dawn LaValle, Atty. Jeff Dowd & Ms. Krista Hess, Co-chairs; Atty. Nancy Boone, Ms. Heather Collins, Mr. Joseph DiBenedetto (by telephone), Ms. Ann Doherty, Ms. Curleen Elliot, Atty. Cheryl Halford, Ms. Jocelyn Kennedy, Ms. Anne Rajotte, Mr. Christopher Roy, Mr. Jonathan Stock,.

Members absent: Atty. Jamey Bell, Ms. Aisha Banks, Atty. Barbara McGrath, Ms. Julie Styles.

- 1.) Welcome members: Chairs.
- 2.) Approval of [Meeting Minutes of May 27, 2014](#): The minutes were approved.
- 3.) Results of survey of public librarians: Ms. LaValle: Nearly 60 public librarians from across the state responded to a survey on legal-related usage/inquiries by patrons. Librarians were asked:
 - To rate the importance of certain legal reference skills; the top answer was 'How to find referral information for non-profit [legal aid programs](#), lawyer [referral services](#), and state bar programs, including pro-bono legal help.'
 - To rate the importance of training to improve legal reference skills: The top answers were 'A series of [Frequently Asked Questions](#),' 'How to find referral information,' and 'The basics of legal information.'
 - How often they accessed online, law-related information to assist a patron, and nearly 60 percent said 'not often.' One-third said, 'somewhat often.' Of those who access online, law-related information, two-thirds said they visit the [Judicial Branch website](#) and the [Law Libraries website](#). Another 20 percent visit Statewide Legal Services' site, [ctlawhelp.org](#)
 - If their libraries had legal reference areas, seventy percent said no.
 - About the responses, they give to patrons asking for [legal references](#).
 - What legal topics are most inquired about by patrons (select more than one): 71 percent said [landlord/tenant issues](#); 68 percent said [wills and estates](#); 56 percent said [divorce](#); and 39 percent said [child custody](#).

- What would be the most useful information resources: 43 of 60 librarians said a legal self-help guide designed for public librarians would be helpful; more than half said a legal reference workshop for librarians, and nearly the same amount said having [quick reference](#) cards on services and resources provided by the courts. Other popular answers included on-site pro bono programs, [webinars or screencasts on legal references](#), and a program for librarians on the various Judicial Branch services that are available to the public, such as Court Service Centers, Public Information Desks, law libraries, etc.
- If they were aware of free legal clinics offered at local law schools, 81 percent were not aware of law school clinics.

The librarians were also asked to comment and make suggestions on how this Workgroup might improve legal references. Among the suggestions:

- New librarians would benefit from help with legal and referral services, and basic legal references.
- Local law library staff should offer resource presentations to public librarians.
- Any help or training would be helpful, especially for librarians in smaller locations where they can be the only reference source.
- Being able to know the difference between legal information and legal advice.
- Legal reference workshops on basic legal reference skills.
- Recommend print and online legal resources to purchase or direct patrons to.
- A ‘cheat sheet’ for parents/guardians looking for information on [education law](#).
- Webinars, because traveling for training is often difficult.

The Workgroup discussed the results and some suggestions were made. Ms. Hess said that some of what the librarians would like to have is currently available, including [quick cards](#) telling patrons what resources are available at [Court Service Centers](#) and Public Information Desks.

Another member pointed out that the Law Libraries website features [a page dedicated to Public Librarians](#), and that the law librarians host [an “Ask the Law Librarian” online email feature](#). The Judicial Branch website includes pages of information dedicated to providing legal information and resources for self-represented parties, including [videos](#), [how-to slidecasts](#), publications and guides, and free forms.

- 4.) Focus groups of public librarians: Ms. LaValle provided a brief overview of planned focus groups of librarians across the state. Details are still being firmed, but it is generally expected that there will be four regional focus groups to get feedback on how they would like to collaborate with court professionals and legal aid providers to provide information and programs to the public. There will be a few questions asked: What are the librarians' needs? patrons' needs? What can the Workgroup do to facilitate this partnership? Ms. LaValle expects the focus groups to be completed by early September, and asked Workgroup members to forward to her any suggestions they might have for questions. Ms. Hess and Ms. Collins said that they have experience in helping to facilitate focus groups, and offered to assist.

There was also discussion about whether the Workgroup may want to survey members of the public.

- 5.) Online calendar: Atty. Dowd presented to the members a mock-up of a calendar, made at his request by JIS, which could be posted to the Branch homepage. The idea of the calendar is to have one place where all pro bono programs and legal aid clinics could be listed in calendar form. The calendar would then be posted to the Judicial Branch website. Currently, the Branch hosts several Volunteer Attorney Day programs, and legal aid providers and others offer various clinics. The Workgroup wants the Judicial Branch to post a monthly calendar for the public. The providers would be responsible for providing to the Branch the program information and a link to the program website for posting on the calendar. Atty. Dowd said he would present the mock-up to the Judicial Branch's internal Web Board, which decides what is posted online, at its July meeting.
- 6.) Next meeting: The next meeting will be in September, with a date and location to be determined.