

Minutes
Workgroup on Libraries & Access to Justice
Wednesday, September 14, 2016
786 South Main Street
Middletown, CT

Members present: Atty. Jeff Dowd, Ms. Krista Hess, Ms. Dawn LaValle, Co-Chairs; Atty. Jamey Bell, Ms. Heather Collins, Ms. Kate Frank, Atty. Cheryl Halford, Mr. Kirk G. Morrison, Ms. Linda Panovich-Sachs, Atty. Anne Rajotte, Ms. Gaye Rizzo, Mr. Christopher M. Roy, Mr. Jonathan Stock.

Absent: Ms. Anne Doherty, Atty. Barbara S. McGrath.

Guest: Atty. Susan Nofi-Garcia.

- I. **Approval of Meeting Minutes of 3/16/16:** The Minutes were approved without change by members who attended the meeting.
- II. **Welcome to New and Continuing Members:** The Co-Chairs introduced three new members, public librarians Mr. Kirk G. Morrison of the Howard Whittemore Memorial Library; Ms. Linda Panovich-Sachs of the Trumbull Public Library, and Ms. Gaye Rizzo of the Windsor Public Library. Additionally, the members introduced themselves and gave brief backgrounds on their work. The chairs also introduced Attorney Nofi-Garcia, the Executive Director of the New Haven Legal Assistance Association.
- III. **Consider Proposed Initiatives from the Access to Justice Commission:**
 - a) **Triage Tool for Librarians & Community Organization:** Ms. Frank demonstrated for the members how CTLawHelp.org helps people with civil (non-criminal) legal needs can obtain help from legal aid providers. The two most researched areas of the website are Housing and Family cases. The site was built with legal aid providers from Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont. It is designed to be intuitive to users.

The site includes [an interview tool](#) to help direct users to the help they may need. Areas of assistance include: Benefits, Consumer Problems, Disability Assistance, Elder Law, Utilities, Family Law, Health Care, Housing, Immigration, Kids and Teens, and Work and Unemployment.

The website includes: [self-help](#) guides; [videos and slideshows](#); an interactive [feature that allows self-represented people to “practice” going to court](#); and information about [free legal clinics](#) across the state.

There was discussion among the members about how the site could be used by public librarians to assist patrons in securing information and resources, as legal aid is only able to assist approximately 1 in 8 of income-eligible people.

Atty. Bell said that Greater Hartford Legal Aid, where she is the Executive Director, has plans to train staff at 10 Hartford libraries on how to use the site.

Ms. Frank noted that the site is currently being updated and will be more mobile-friendly. This is important, as many people rely on internet access via mobile phones.

Next steps: The consensus of the group is that there needs to be marketing of the available resources to librarians, combined with training on how to use the resources in conjunction with patrons. The goal is to help people find the resources and information they need, and helping librarians to feel comfortable with the resources.

- b) **"Justice Clinics" in Public Libraries:** Ms. Hess led a discussion on providing on-site "Justice Clinics" in public libraries, with information for librarians, and for the public. The ATJ Commission would like to see an expansion of volunteer (pro bono) attorney programs. Ms. Hess manages [the Judicial Branch's Volunteer Civil Legal Assistance Attorney Programs \(VAP\)](#) for Family and consumer issues, while Atty. Halford manages the Branch's VAP for Foreclosure. These programs are available to anyone, not only those who are income qualified. Thousands of people have been helped since the first VAP was launched in Hartford Family Court in 2010. The challenge in expanding the programs to other areas is that there is an element of "pro bono fatigue" among the members of the Bar.

Outside of the Branch, the New Haven County Bar Association has long operated its own VAP in that county's public libraries.

There was discussion about the Judicial Branch's Legal Exchange Programs, which are coordinated by Chief Clerks with other Judicial Branch staff members, and are open to the public. Although the Exchanges are marketed as an opportunity for members of the Bar to meet with Judges and court staff while learning about [the Law Libraries](#), new Practice Book rules, programs, e-filing, Court Service Centers, etc., they may be an excellent introduction to public librarians about what services are available within the Branch. The Legal Exchange Programs are noticed on the Branch's internet website.

Also notable is [a newly-launched webpage on the Law Libraries website](#), specifically for public librarians, with general information.

Going forward: The Workgroup may create a subcommittee dedicated to creating programing and arranging for Justice Clinics, with or without volunteer attorneys.

- c) **Development of Relevant & Sustainable Programs:** Mr. Roy has worked with Atty. Halford and Atty. Dowd and Ms. LaValle to develop a 3 ½-hour training for public librarians. This four-part program, which will be held on December 8th, will focus on: An overview of Legal Research Resources; Small-group discussions on legal questions and potential patron scenarios, with participants learning how to research the Branch's web sources for information and assistance; Conducting a Legal Reference Interview: the small groups will learn the process and the difference between providing legal information, and not legal advice; and they will break into small groups and practice reference questions, with instructors providing real-time feedback. It is the goal that these programs will develop into ongoing training, with facilitators from public and law libraries, as well as Branch staff, working to conduct them across the state. The Workgroup chairs extended their thanks to Jocelyn Kennedy and Anne Rajotte for their assistance.

- d) **Judicial Branch Volunteers in Libraries** (Akin to Speaker's Bureau): Ms. Collins suggested that, in planning Justice Clinics, the Branch may be able to recruit volunteers from within the staff, to attend the clinics –targeting nights and weekends—and provide information to librarians and the public, on what services are available from the Judicial Branch.

IV. Assign date for next meeting and assign tasks: The co-chairs will send the members a list of potential dates for the next meeting, which will include the assignment of tasks.