

**Workgroup on Libraries & Access to Justice**  
**Minutes of the**  
**Workgroup on Libraries & Access to Justice**  
**2 o'clock p.m.**  
**27 October, 2015**  
**225 Spring Street**  
**Wethersfield, CT**

**Members in attendance:** Atty. Jeffrey J. Dowd & Ms. Dawn La Valle, Co-Chairs; Atty. Jamey Bell, Atty. Cheryl Halford, Atty. Jocelyn Kennedy, Atty. Anne Rajotte, Mr. Christopher M. Roy, Mr. Jonathan Stock.

**Members absent:** Ms. Krista Hess, Co-Chair; Ms. Heather Collins, Mr. Joseph DiBenedetto, Ms. Ann H. Doherty, Ms. Julie Styles.

The meeting was called to order at 2:02 pm.

I. Review and approval of draft minutes – February 4, 2015

The Workgroup voted to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2015 meeting of the Workgroup on Libraries & Access to Justice. Draft minutes of the June 4, 2015 meeting will be forthcoming.

II. Review and discussion of Justice Fair evaluation

Atty. Dowd asked members to share their individual impressions of the Justice Fair.

Ms. La Valle began by saying how well organized the Fair was, and that the written materials were impressive and thorough. She shared that she has received tremendous feedback from public librarians, and that one individual in particular, who has not been to a program in a long time, conveyed to her that the Fair was one of the best events that he has ever attended. Ms. La Valle further commented that it was great to bring everyone to the table to understand what others do, and that, until people are in the same room together, you cannot truly get traction. She was thrilled with the wealth of resources provided on all fronts, and she indicated that the Fair has sparked interest in wanting more. Ms. La Valle further shared how she learned a lot herself at the Fair, and that it would be wonderful to have an event like this every year, to maintain these relationships and build new ones. Lastly, Ms. La Valle mentioned how her division has incorporated “legal literacy” as one of their 7 literacies for their Strategic Planning, and that it is a boon for public librarians to be able to go beyond pointing a patron to a Nolo book.

Mr. Stock agreed with Ms. La Valle’s assessment of the Fair, and he relayed that the greatest value of the Fair was networking. He and Ms. La Valle discussed how fantastic it was to see Connecticut Bar Association (CBA) Executive Director, Atty. Douglas S. Brown, and President, Atty. William H. Clendenen, Jr., in attendance, as the CBA shares

access to justice as its primary objective, and that Atty. Brown said it all when he emphasized how public libraries are the first point of entry.

Mr. Roy and Atty. Halford echoed these sentiments, and Mr. Roy shared his impression that it was a well-organized, great program, which provided a broad overview and the opportunity to focus in on where the needs are. He relayed his hope that the word will continue to spread, as we work together towards our common goal of access to justice. Atty. Halford shared that, like Ms. La Valle, she learned a great deal at the Fair. In listening to the moderated discussions, it was eye opening to reflect on the different lenses through which we all encounter, and respond to, access to justice issues.

Atty. Bell thought that the Fair was great, and she indicated that she would like to hear more from public librarians. She would be interested in knowing the specific scenarios that public librarians encounter and what would be effective in helping them to respond. She suggested that perhaps a statewide sampling could be undertaken – the questions could be very specific to try to capture what public librarians are seeing, what they do now, and what they wish they could do. This data would be invaluable in assessing what would be most helpful to public librarians in building a legal aid partnership. Ms. La Valle emphasized how one of the reasons why legal literacy for public librarians is so important is the very fluid nature of the law.

Atty. Rajotte shared with the members that a law student had approached her after the Fair about civil Gideon and that he was very inspired by the discussion. She emphasized that, in working towards access to justice, the private bar is critical and that it would be great for them to become more involved. Atty. Kennedy stated how there was little that she could add that had not already been said, but she wanted to mention how much she loved the resources for attendees and the written materials, in particular.

Atty. Dowd mentioned how, by necessity, there was a lot of material crammed into a short period of time, but it was still highly successful as a half-day program. Mr. Stock suggested that perhaps, in the future, a full day program could be offered, but Ms. La Valle indicated that this could be difficult from a coverage perspective. Atty. Dowd also discussed how the survey evaluation provided great feedback about the Fair, and Ms. La Valle commented how it seemed that there were mutual “Aha!” moments on the part of all attendees.

### III. Discussion regarding coordination of next steps, outreach & follow up with public libraries and legal aid

Ms. La Valle suggested that perhaps smaller, more focused events could be done throughout the year, which could lead up to a larger, wrap-up event. In terms of this progression, Ms. La Valle noted that enthusiasm and support can be gained along the way when you are able to show where we have succeeded and what we have achieved.

Atty. Dowd asked the members where they would suggest having the Fair, if there was to be another one. Quinnipiac University School of Law and Yale Law School were identified as possible options.

Atty. Dowd asked Mr. Roy and Atty. Halford if they could give the members an update on the Court Services and Legal Reference for Librarians workshop. They relayed that the first offering will be on October 29, 2015 at the Middletown Library Service Center, with Mr. Roy and Ms. Hess as co-facilitators. Once any feedback is received and suggestions are incorporated, they would like to have additional offerings and to record one for future viewings. Ms. La Valle welcomed this idea, and she mentioned the possibility of having a workshop in Fairfield County.

When Atty. Dowd asked the members for any ideas of next steps, Atty. Kennedy emphasized continuing to build relationships – connecting legal aid with public libraries, getting law students in the public libraries, etc. She mentioned how there are approximately 400 students at the University of Connecticut School of Law, and she underscored the school's commitment to public interest and experiential learning. Ms. La Valle echoed that the focus and commitment towards our shared goal of access to justice must be long term, and that it cannot be a flash in the pan. Ms. La Valle mentioned progressive initiatives that are happening in the nation, such as social workers coming into public libraries. Atty. Kennedy relayed that she would be happy to participate and help in any way needed. In engaging public libraries, she mentioned how we should not make public librarians come to us, we should go to them. Ms. La Valle reiterated that the 6 Regions of the Connecticut Library Association (CLA) are the perfect conduit to network regionally. She stated how public librarians like tools, and that the development of ready reference materials, online tools, calendars with clinics, etc., are most welcome.

Atty. Dowd mentioned how there is discussion about possibly putting the written materials from the Fair online, and that they could perhaps live on the [For Librarians](#) page of the Judicial Branch Law Library Services website. Ms. Hess will speak with Judges Solomon and Kahn about the idea, and, if they are in agreement, Atty. Dowd will then pitch it to the Judicial Branch's Web Board. Ms. La Valle cautioned that one difficulty is maintaining the integrity of the information, as updates may become necessary.

Mr. Roy brought up the topic of plain language, and how legal aid's publications are written in plain language with an audience of self-represented parties in mind, whereas the publications of the Judicial Branch Law Libraries are split between finding legal information and doing legal research. Atty. Kennedy expressed interest in developing a program on how to do a legal reference interview. She discussed how individuals can be trained and then become trainers themselves. Atty. Bell mentioned how legal aid does this, and Ms. La Valle said how lots of public librarians teach. Ms. La Valle thought that a train the trainer program for legal information would be wonderful for public librarians. Mr. Roy indicated that he would be happy to work with Atty. Kennedy on the legal reference interview piece, which can be incorporated into future workshops.

Atty. Dowd mentioned how some librarians have expressed interest in having an Ask-An-Attorney day at their public library, but he was not sure to whom to refer them. Ms. La Valle stated that CBA Executive Director, Atty. Douglas S. Brown, would be a good contact for the Workgroup for purposes of discussing how to bring the bar and public libraries together. Atty. Bell suggested that such programs could be scheduled by subject matter – one week could be for questions about probate, another week could be for family matters, and so on. Mr. Stock wholeheartedly supports such ideas, but he expressed concern about budget issues and cuts.

Ms. La Valle proposed the idea of possibly applying for an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant, which encourages libraries to test and evaluate specific innovations in the ways they operate and the services they provide. She asked Atty. Rajotte, Atty. Kennedy, and Atty. Halford if they would be interested in exploring the idea more with her staff, and they were. Ms. La Valle will provide members with additional information about the grant application.

#### IV. Next meeting

Atty. Dowd and Ms. La Valle will speak with Ms. Hess about her availability, and the Co-Chairs will reach out to the members to schedule the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 pm.