

Minutes
Subcommittee on Support Enforcement/Family Matters
Public Service and Trust Commission
Subcommittee on Expectations of the Public

The Chair, members, and representatives of the Subcommittee on Support Enforcement Services/Family Matters met at SES, 287 Main St., third Floor, East Hartford on December 30, 2008.

In attendance: Hon. Kenneth L. Shluger, Chair, Magistrate Jed N. Schulman, Mr. Frank Rizzo, Mr. Joseph Greelish.

The meeting was called to order at 3:12 p.m.

1. Welcome and introduction of Subcommittee members. Mr. Greelish attended the meeting on behalf of Support Enforcement Services (SES) Director Atty. Charisse Hutton.
2. Discussion of Subcommittee task: to evaluate and review what material is currently online regarding SES/Family Matters; examining what problems and questions arise for people utilizing Branch services, programs, and facilities with respect to SES/Family; and ways to assist those people coming in to court.
3. Review of materials available: Mr. Greelish presented the Subcommittee with a folder of written materials currently available in courthouses, at Court Service Centers, and from SES staff. These include a brochure, in both English and Spanish, entitled, "A child needs emotional and financial support of both parents." This brochure is also available online. It includes 10 frequently asked questions; a directory of phone numbers including toll-free numbers for the Child Support Call Center and a number to call with questions about Child Support Payments; and numbers for SES offices across the state. The brochure also spells out SES' mission in collecting and securing financial and medical support for children. Another publication is a wallet-sized card given to parents who have orders to pay support; it has phone numbers, the mail-in address for payments, and spaces for the payment amount, next court date, and SES officer name. Another form is the "Instructions for Modification Hearing," which spells out for defendants what they need to bring to court for support hearings, and attached to that, directions on how to complete a financial affidavit. Mr. Greelish also presented copies of materials that are currently available on the Branch's Website, including an extensive Child Support Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page.

4. Discussion of possible approaches: The Subcommittee discussed ways in which information can be made available to the public and how to determine what information is most requested. The Subcommittee suggested that Branch facilities may consider installing wireless internet (WiFi) in courthouses; having “greeters” in courthouses to answer the public’s questions as they arrive; and install clearer and more direct signage regarding locations, times, etc. for proceedings. The Subcommittee also said the Branch’s Internet site is a source that could be expanded to delineate more clearly for people what they need to bring to court; what they can expect when they arrive including specifics regarding parking and other general information such as ATM availability, food and bathroom locations, etc. Magistrate Schulman said Court Service Centers, which are available in many but not all courthouses, should be more widely used by the public and suggested the Branch may want to consider installing more computers for the public’s use. He also suggested that the Branch might want to create an educational video explaining court procedures for the self-represented. The video would play on a continuous loop within public areas of the courthouses. The need for disseminating information in languages other than English was also discussed; the Public Service Trust Commission’s Committee on Limited English Proficiency is examining this need. Judge Shluger suggested this Subcommittee review existing materials for ease of readability and ease of understanding by the public. The Subcommittee also discussed the problems that may be faced by the self-represented, who make up a large percentage of SES clients and in Family matters. There was a consensus that if people are more prepared prior to coming to court, their cases and Judicial operations in general would operate more efficiently. The Subcommittee discussed the need for Branch forms to be written in simpler plain language and the methods and possibility of providing parties with specific and plainly written court orders.
5. Assignments of tasks: Subcommittee members were assigned tasks to complete before the next meeting. Judge Shluger will look at the summons forms currently used by SES to see if they are readable and understandable for the public. Atty. Hutton will examine the Branch’s Internet offerings and will report at the next meeting what can and should be done to assist the public from the Website. Mr. Rizzo will examine all the materials currently offered at Court Service Centers and Information desks. Judge Shluger and Magistrate Schulman will collaborate on a script for the suggested instructional “how to” video for the self-represented.
6. Schedule further meetings: The Subcommittee will next meet on Wednesday, January 21, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. and on Wednesday, February 18, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. at 225 Spring Street in Wethersfield, CT.