

Subcommittee on SES/Family Matters  
Public Service and Trust Commission  
Committee on Expectations of the Public

Room 204  
Court Operations  
225 Spring Street  
Wethersfield, CT

January 21, 2009  
3:30 PM

Those in attendance: Atty. Charisse Hutton, Mr. Frank Rizzo, and Hon. Kenneth Shluger (chair)

The meeting was called to order at 3:40 PM.

1. Review and approval of minutes of meeting on December 30, 2008 – Upon motion and second, the minutes of the meeting were approved unanimously.
2. Reports from subcommittee members – The subcommittee first reviewed its charge in conjunction with the general list of recommendations that it had discussed at the last meeting. After discussion, it was determined that some of those recommendations are being covered by other committees (i.e., signage, overall review of the web site). This subcommittee will focus on preparing the script for informational videos, recommending improvements to the branch website specifically in the area of family materials, analyzing motions and summons forms that are sent to or used by the public and driving people to the Judicial Branch website as a source of information. It was noted that the website is one of the ways of providing information to the public, but more traditional ways must be used as well because not everyone has computer and Internet access at home.

Several suggestions for subcommittee recommendations to other committees were made including: recommending to the Committee on Self Represented Parties the addition of family information to the Frequently Asked Questions section of the website; recommending to the Committee on Web Enhancement the addition of publications to the website; and recommending to the Committee on LEP that publications be made consistently available in other languages.

A specific suggestion was made regarding the advisement of rights that is provided to people appearing in the Family Support Magistrate courts. It was noted that the advisement is so lengthy and addresses so many things that it may be difficult to absorb as it is read from the bench at the beginning of the proceeding. Possibly this subcommittee could provide an online video of a magistrate reading the advisement or make the text available online for the public. An advisement of rights is a product that this subcommittee might want to make available, both as a full text document and as a bulleted summary on a palm card, in order to demystify the experience for the public.

The subcommittee members then discussed the following specific reports from members:

- Draft scripts for informational videos on divorce proceedings and family support matters – Judge Shluger had prepared a script for an informational video that could be made available online as well as in the courthouse. The subcommittee members agreed that the content was excellent and comprehensive. Staff will work on making sure that the language of the script is in keeping with plain language guidelines and at an accessible reading level. Magistrate Schulman will email his script to staff as well.

A discussion ensued as to what mechanism could be used to get information to the public in advance of their coming to the court including information on the forms or documents that they would need, child support guidelines, and people in court who could assist them. This information could be made part of notices or the summons itself or given to people as they appear for short calendar or case management dates or in an informational video that would play constantly at the courthouse and online. It may be preferable to have the video in modules or parts: (1) when you come to court for a dissolution; (2) when you come to court for a modification, etc.

- The Judicial Branch website and suggested improvements – Atty. Hutton had some general comments on the website and will organize her comments into specific recommendations for the next meeting. In general, the website has helpful information but it is difficult to find. It also needs some additional family information and to have that information organized so that it is more convenient for the user.
  - Existing handouts and brochures and discussion – Mr. Rizzo went through numerous brochures and publications and came up with specific recommendations for several publications. For the next meeting, he will refine his notes and have specific recommendations for the Judicial Branch publications. Some general recommendations may include avoiding Latin phrases and incorporating more plain language in all publications.
  - Information provided on summons forms and motions served upon members of the public – Judge Shluger will look at the summons form, which does not seem to have been updated since 2005, as well as other documents that are served upon members of the public and report back at the next meeting.
3. Discussion of future tasks – Atty. Hutton will continue with her recommendations on improvements to the website, looking at support, custody, visitation, domestic violence, and divorce. Staff will send the link to the Massachusetts site to all subcommittee members. Mr. Rizzo will organize his comments on the publications; and staff will work on the scripts and circulate the revised versions to the members of the subcommittee in advance of the next meeting.
  4. Discussion of recommendations – Recommendations will be discussed at the next meeting.
  5. Future meetings – The next meeting of the subcommittee is scheduled for February 18, 2009 at 3:30 PM in Wethersfield.

The meeting adjourned at 5:01 PM.