

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

February 18, 2009
3:30 PM

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

The meeting was called to order at 3:41 PM.

Review and approval of minutes of meeting on January 21, 2009 – Upon motion and second, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Atty. Hutton provided a brief report about the meeting of the subcommittee chairs on February 10, 2009. The subcommittee chairs reported out on the work that each subcommittee was doing and about their anticipated completion date. Atty. Hutton had represented the SES/Family Subcommittee on Judge Shluger's behalf. The reports from each subcommittee demonstrated the common themes from each subcommittee: the goal is to address questions about what will happen to people when they come to court and help those people prepare more effectively for court; a great deal of information is available, but it must be organized in a more accessible way; and information must be provided to people earlier, in multiple languages, and in a simplified format. The subcommittee chairs agreed to submit a report, including proposed recommendations and drafts of the products by Friday, March 27th to staff for distribution to the full committee prior to its meeting on April 7, 2009.

Report on drafts – A general discussion ensued on the best ways to distribute information to the public. It is difficult to determine the percentage of the people coming to the courts who actually go to the Internet to obtain information. Sending out a separate letter could be costly. Getting information out with the papers that people receive anyway is a good option for distribution. Specifically in the support enforcement area, it would be possible to have staff provide brochures or other documents at the same time process is served. Another possible distribution point is when Support Enforcement sends out the notice of the court date to all parties. Any materials could be included with that mailing. Atty. Hutton will write up a brief recommendation on ways to distribute the material to the public.

The draft of the brochure was reviewed briefly. Atty. Hutton will provide additional feedback from her staff and Magistrate Shluger will review the brochure more extensively. A revised draft will then be circulated to the subcommittee.

After extensive discussion of the summons, it was decided that the form should be revised to include a specific direction to go to the website for additional information. The same recommendation will be made with respect to the order to attend and notice to respondent in connection with a contempt or modification.

Discussion ensued on the "homegrown" materials on divorce that exist in the judicial districts. After discussion, it was determined that the subcommittee would include in its report that we identified a number of local/homegrown instruction sheets that are around divorce and that we recommend that

the branch review the existing local material and develop a statewide and uniform product to provide this information.

Recommendations on the website were also reviewed and discussed. The recommendations recognize that a great deal of information is out there, but that it must be organized so that it is more accessible. General recommendations about material on the website are that materials should be offered in two languages (depending upon the findings of the LEP Committee), be written in simple language, and be provided in multiple formats. Specific recommendations include the expansion of the website to include FAQs on Domestic Violence and Family, including custody and visitation, and maybe paternity; and providing links to existing forms and resources from one location so that someone can just find everything more readily.

The draft of the script addressing dissolution and contempt was discussed. After discussion, Judge Schulman offered to work on turning the script in a final product. A recommendation regarding this script and the script on family support magistrate court will be submitted suggesting that these scripts be used by the Committee on Self-represented parties. The videos could be useful resource for the self-represented parties, but the specifics of how the video is made, the budget, etc. are questions the subcommittee will not be addressing.

The draft of the recommendations on forms in the family area was reviewed. Several brochures and guides were discussed. For example, the "Do It Yourself Divorce Guide" could be updated to include more current information, including using the Internet to obtain necessary information for the nonmilitary affidavit, updating the web address, and expanding the list of court personnel to include court service center staff. This report will be submitted as part of the recommendations of the subcommittee.

After general discussion, the subcommittee agreed that the final report of the subcommittee will include a summary of what the group did and what it considered, the specific draft products, and the specific recommendations on the website and on publications. For the recommendations, Mr. Rizzo and Atty. Hutton will write a brief introduction to their recommendations before sending the final draft to Judge Shluger. All material will be sent to Judge Shluger by March 13th so that he can put the full report together and circulate it to the subcommittee members by March 20th for comment.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 pm