

Pro Bono Committee
Follow-Up Summit Workgroup
December 16, 2015
2:00p.m.
225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, CT
Room 206

1. Chairman Attorney Jonathan Shapiro called the meeting to order at 2:04p.m. with the following Workgroup members in attendance: Attorney Jonathan Shapiro (Chair), Attorney Lester Arnold, Attorney Jamey Bell, Attorney Steve Eppler-Epstein and Attorney Mark Nordstrom.
2. The Workgroup voted unanimously to approve the minutes from the October 13, 2013 and October 30, 2014 meetings of the Follow-Up Summit Workgroup.
3. Attorney Shapiro led the group in a discussion regarding the status of initiatives. With respect to pro bono and Probate Courts, Attorney Norm Janes, who was the most active in this area, has subsequently moved to Pennsylvania. The Workgroup shifted the discussion to the “Mission of Mercy” dental clinic, which Attorney Eppler-Epstein said will be held in the fall of 2016 in Bridgeport. Attorney Bell, who has worked in the area of dental reimbursement rates, is in communication with the planners of the event, and she will be following up with them on behalf of the Workgroup. The majority of the other initiatives are not being pursued, with the exception of those involving law students. Judge Moll, however, has reconstituted the Law School Workgroup of the Pro Bono Committee, which will be taking up these initiatives. Krista Hess will speak with Judge Moll about the Workgroup pursuing the idea of emailing firms and corporations to ask if they would like to “adopt” a pro bono program.
4. Attorney Shapiro provided the Workgroup with an update on the status of pro bono best practices. He and Attorney Edward J. Heath of Robinson & Cole thought that it would be a good idea to survey ten to fifteen bigger law firms regarding their best practices, such as what constitutes pro bono versus community service, identifying and sourcing out new pro bono matters, intake measures, and partner involvement. This would provide the Workgroup with an overall sense of what is out there, and, by compiling responses from such a pool, it would benefit everyone to know what others are doing.

Attorney Nordstrom inquired whether consideration had been given to reaching out to in-house attorneys, and Attorney Shapiro responded that they thought that they would start small, with law firms, and then expand to in-house and others. Attorney Arnold asked about next steps, and Ms. Hess asked whether Attorney Heath will remain involved, since he has been succeeded by Attorney Peter Knight on the Pro Bono Committee. Attorney Shapiro indicated that Attorney Knight will step into Attorney Heath’s role, and pick up where he left off.

5. Attorney Shapiro asked whether there has been any talk of holding another summit. This possibility has not been specifically discussed, but there is definitely interest in holding local bar association mini-summits. Attorney Eppler-Epstein relayed that Attorney Karen DeMeola, Vice President of the Connecticut Bar Association, has offered to help coordinate with the local bar presidents. Ms. Hess will reach out to Attorney DeMeola on behalf of the Workgroup.
6. Attorney Shapiro posed to the Workgroup the idea of creating a signature project for a Hartford law firm by pairing it with a non-profit organization like Community Renewal Team, Inc. (CRT) to provide legal help to the individuals and communities that such an organization serves. Attorney Eppler-Epstein and Attorney Bell expressed their concern that due to the broad array of legal issues faced by this demographic, the breadth of experience of a legal aid attorney would be needed. Although similar initiatives have been undertaken, such as in the context of homeless shelters, a legal aid attorney would be best equipped to address such legal needs.

Ms. Hess asked the Workgroup if there is interest in pulling in public libraries, which the members supported. Attorney Bell stated that Greater Hartford Legal Aid is exploring a closer, on-site relationship with the Hartford Public Library, with the first step being to understand the kind of need. Attorney Eppler-Epstein also mentioned that the public library in Stamford has expressed interest in getting legal aid staff into the library.

Attorney Shapiro mentioned that since the next Pro Bono Committee meeting is on February 2, 2016, perhaps the Workgroup can reconvene after the holidays, sometime in mid-January. In the meantime, Attorney Shapiro will identify law firms to pool regarding their pro bono best practices, and the members can assist with reaching out to them individually.

7. The meeting adjourned at 2:27p.m.