

Minutes

Public Service and Trust Commission Committee on Self-represented Parties Subcommittee on Legal Services

February 4, 2009

The Public Service and Trust Commission Committee on Self-represented Parties, Subcommittee on Legal Services met at 20 Franklin Square, New Britain, Connecticut, Courtroom 3G on February 4, 2009.

Those in attendance: Hon. Henry Cohn (Chair), Chief Family Support Magistrate Sandra Sosnoff Baird, Attorney Janice Chiaretto, Attorney Steven Eppler-Epstein, and Attorney Timothy Fisher.

Judge Cohn called the meeting to order at 10:20 a.m.

The subcommittee reviewed and discussed their proposals concerning unbundling of legal services and funding of the legal aid network:

The subcommittee will model the Massachusetts program to draft a proposal for piloting unbundling of legal services in Connecticut courts. Judge Cohn will continue to review the Massachusetts program and report back to the subcommittee of any structural changes that may be required, such as amendments to statutes, rules or court practices. It will be equally important to research potential pitfalls or any reluctance to unbundling of legal services so that the subcommittee's proposal will include ways to minimize those concerns. The subcommittee members agreed that a program of this kind will require support from the Bar and consumer representatives such as the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWELF).

The subcommittee discussed the legal services funding crisis and why it is important to the Judicial Branch that adequate funding is received. Overall, without adequate levels of legal aid funding, there will be more self-represented litigants in court left to navigate the courts without access to legal aid lawyers. The burden is then placed on the staff and judges who are limited in the amount of legal information they are allowed to provide. Attorney Eppler-Epstein announced a public hearing on February 23, 2009 starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. On behalf of the legal services network, he is encouraging anyone who supports legal services to attend this hearing and testify on their behalf. The subcommittee will propose recommendations to Judge Bozzuto and Judge Norko prior to the February hearing in hopes that these recommendations may be heard at the public hearing.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.