

**Minutes**  
**Public Service and Trust Commission**  
**Committee on Self-represented Parties**  
**Subcommittee on Support Services**  
**December 11, 2008**

The Public Service and Trust Commission Committee on Self-represented Parties, Subcommittee on Support Services met at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, CT in Room 133 on December 11, 2008.

Those in attendance: Attorney Hugh C. Macgill (chair), Ms. Priscilla Arroyo, Attorney Anthony DiPentima, Ms. Krista Hess, and Attorney Norman Janes.

Attorney Macgill called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m.

1. Subcommittee members reviewed the subcommittee charge to determine their scope of work.
2. The subcommittee members paid particular attention to the areas for consideration under their charge: 1) to research potential pitfalls of advice days including, but not limited to, malpractice and liability issues for the court and for volunteer attorneys; 2) to evaluate new and inventive ways to meet the needs of self-represented people including, but not limited to, assessing the feasibility of creating dedicated dockets specifically for self-represented litigants, and the need to implement a courthouse greeters program to welcome and direct all courthouse patrons as they enter the facility; 3) to consider the need to increase support services for self-represented parties through the Court Service Centers; 4) to examine a variety of methods to make mediation services more readily available to self-represented litigants; and 5) to study the need for designated self-represented clerks to assist self-represented parties at the trial and appellate levels.

Subcommittee members engaged in a discussion about advice days when volunteer attorneys would be made available in the courts to offer free legal advice and assistance to any person seeking information. The subcommittee discussed some obvious concerns with instituting advice days, such as legal liabilities and insurance. Additional research and inquiries must be done to determine under which legal insurance policy would the volunteer attorney be covered- the Judicial Branch or the volunteer attorney's. There may also be an option of having the person sign a liability waiver. Other considerations for instituting advice days include locating private space in each courthouse; the need for interpreting services; how to draw attorneys to participate in the program; and training of attorneys and Judicial Branch staff on how to operate advice days. The subcommittee will research these issues and others to determine the feasibility of advice days for self-represented parties. They agreed that once these issues of concern have been answered, the program should be piloted on a limited basis in a courthouse to be determined.

The subcommittee also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of creating a dedicated docket for self-represented individuals. The subcommittee took care to consider the pros and cons for self-represented parties, as well as other attorneys,

litigants, judges and staff. For example, a dedicated docket may ease the overwhelming fear and feeling of isolation some self-represented parties may feel amid other litigants that are represented by attorneys, especially if the dedicated docket is scheduled on less busy days of the court. On other days, attorneys may appreciate the expediency of dockets with experienced litigators in court. However, there is a concern that it should not appear that justice is less served for those that represent themselves. There is also an issue of how to handle cases where one party is self-represented and the other by an attorney. The subcommittee will contact the National Center for State Courts to inquire if a dedicated docket for self-represented parties is currently being done in other states. Pending further research, the subcommittee will recommend piloting this program for uncontested divorces in the New Britain Judicial District.

A dedicated clerk to assist self-represented parties at the trial and appellate levels was briefly discussed. Attorney Susan Reeve from the Appellate Clerk's Office will be invited to the next Support Services meeting to give her input on this consideration. The subcommittee will also contact a state that has a dedicated clerk to obtain more information. In addition to a dedicated clerk, subcommittee members suggested other measures to assist self-represented parties, such as a Practice Book for self-represented parties, and ongoing training for Court Service Center staff. The subcommittee also recognized the Judicial Branch website as a very important resource for self-represented parties.

The subcommittee is also charged with researching the need for courthouse greeters who welcome and direct all court house patrons as they enter the facility. Courthouse greeters may prove to be another very important resource for self-represented parties. The subcommittee will explore the possibility of this program through the Judicial Branch Volunteer and Intern Program.

Finally, subcommittee members discussed ways to make mediation services more readily available to self-represented litigants. There are many benefits of mediation programs, and currently, there are a variety of mediation services offered free of charge. There are court-annexed mediation, mediation in housing, and various dispute resolution programs in Court Support Services. Despite their many benefits, the use of mediation programs is low. It is believed that these services are not promoted well. The subcommittee will meet with the appropriate mediation staff to discuss how they currently make their service known to attorneys and litigants. The subcommittee plans to recommend novel ways to promote mediation services making them a part of the culture of dispute resolution.

The next meeting of the Committee on Self-represented Parties, Subcommittee on Support Services will be on December 16, 2008 at 4:00 p.m. via teleconference at 225 Spring Street in Wethersfield, CT in Room 204.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.