

Probate Court Budget Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 17, 2010
4:00 PM

Library at the Office of the Probate Court Administrator
186 Newington Road, West Hartford, CT

The meeting was convened at 4:07 PM.

In attendance: Judge Paul J. Knierim, Probate Court Administrator and Chair, Judge Joseph Marino and Judge Dianne Yamin.

PCA staff in attendance: Andrea King, Director of Financial Services, Attorney Bonnie Bennet, and Vincent Russo.

Public Comment

Judge Knierim announced that the committee has received several pieces of correspondence.

Those submitting letters were:

The Hon. E. Michael Heffernan, Judge of the West Haven Probate Court; Bernice Hawley, Asst. Clerk of the Danbury Probate Court; Linda Neal, Clerk of the Colchester Probate Court; Patricia McPherson, Clerk of the Andover Probate Court

Judge Knierim asked for comments from those in attendance.

Those making comments were:

The Hon. Sydney Elkin, Judge of the West Hartford Probate Court; Mary MacGregor, Clerk of the Glastonbury Probate Court and the President of the CT Association of Probate Clerks; Cynthia Zdanukis, Asst. Clerk of the Hartford Probate Court; Marianne Arancio Stilson, Clerk of the New Milford Probate Court and the Vice President of the CT Association of Probate Clerks; Tracy Morrissey, Asst. Clerk of the West Haven Probate Court; Elaine Johnson, Clerk of the Wallingford Probate Court; and The Hon. Dom Calabrese, Judge of the Woodbury Probate Court

The presentation by the Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks was deferred to March 10.

Job Classifications and Job Descriptions

Judge Knierim reviewed the proposed revisions to the job classifications and job descriptions that were presented at the previous meeting. He noted that, under the revised structure, every court will have a chief clerk. There would be three distinct pay ranges for chief clerk based upon the number of staff at the court. A new title of clerk would provide a career progression beyond assistant clerk. The compensation consultant is currently updating the salary study in light of the new job descriptions.

Judge Marino moved to approve the job classifications and job descriptions, and Judge Yamin seconded the motion.

Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously. (Posted on web page under "Job Classifications")

Preliminary Staffing Levels

Judge Knierim presented updated staffing worksheets containing additional data and analysis based on discussion at the last meeting. (Posted on the web page under "Staffing Guidelines")

The committee discussed a method to obtain input from courts on their staffing needs. Committee members agreed that data such as population and workload are important factors, but that courts should have an opportunity to supply other relevant information. To facilitate this process, the committee will issue a preliminary staffing recommendation for each court. The preliminary recommendation will then be sent to each court with a request that the court respond with any proposed changes and explanation of those suggestions. The committee can then evaluate information from the courts before making a final determination.

The committee then reviewed the document entitled "Staffing Guidelines Staff Ranges," which establishes guidelines for the number of staff authorized for each position based upon the overall staffing level of the court. Judge Marino moved to approve the probate court staffing ranges, and Judge Yamin seconded.

Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously. (Posted on web page under "Staffing Guidelines Staff Ranges" first page)

The committee then discussed overall staffing levels for the individual courts. (Posted on web page under "Preliminary Staffing Levels") The committee discussed applying a formula approach. Any court would be able to present information in support of proposed adjustments.

The committee decided to defer a vote on the issue until the February 24th meeting.

Preliminary Office Budgets

The committee reviewed the proposed office budgets of the Regional Children's Probate Courts. Judge Knierim indicated that the proposed budgets were modestly lower than the current fiscal year.

Judge Marino moved to approve the office budgets for the Regional Children's Probate Courts, Judge Yamin seconded.

Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously. (Posted on web page under "Regional Children's Probate Courts Office Expenses")

Merging courts have been afforded more time to formulate office budget proposals. PCA staff will follow up with those courts that have not yet submitted a proposal.

The committee began a line-by-line review the office budgets for the non-merging courts.

The committee began with worker's compensation insurance expenses. The committee decided to initially set a budget for the 6 month period from January 5, 2011 to June 30, 2011 at one-half the 2009 total actual expense. The committee recognizes that some courts may pay their entire annual premium in full during that time period, while others may pay the premium during the other half of the year, and will make adjustments as courts refine the information for the committee.

Mileage and travel reimbursement was discussed next. The committee determined to use the 2009 figures for non-merging courts. Merging courts will be deferred until their budget proposals are available, however the committee expects their costs will be less considering that the number of judges is being reduced.

Other Business

None

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:04 PM.

The next meeting will be February 24, 2010 at 4 PM.