

January 20, 2010

Probate Court Budget Committee

Hon. Paul J. Knierim

Hon. Joseph D. Marino

Hon. Dianne E. Yamin

Your committee has been created by our legislators, and you are charged with the tasks of reporting annually to the Governor and the General Assembly "about any potential cost savings" and your "efforts to reduce expenses in the probate court system." Perhaps there are no realistic and equitable ways to cut costs at this time.

First, and foremost, as so many of us were, and continue to be, under-compensated in salary and benefits, please do not try to reduce expenses on our backs. We have suffered in this economy of rising costs with no raise in salary for two years, with not even a cost-of-living adjustment.

Secondly, you should recognize that the 2008 Compensation and Classification Study compared apples to oranges, and those of us who found ourselves inappropriately pigeon-holed into classifications and minimum/market salaries, had no recourse but to convince our Judges to approach a panel of their peers to plead our case. This method did not work well for most.

Lastly, it appears that you have compared Probate Court staff benefits to Judicial Branch employees' Current Practices Related to Work Absences. The committee has chosen to dilute the Judicial policy to create our "Paid Time-Off Policies", which I find disheartening and discriminatory. Are we second-class to judicial employees? It is so discouraging to think that you approved a time-off policy that requires 15 years of service to earn three weeks of vacation; and an additional 10 years to earn a 4th week!

So, on to the matters at hand today. . .

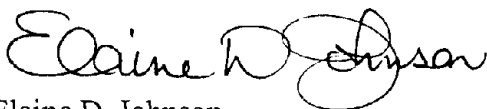
The updated compensation study still compares Connecticut Probate staff to many out-of-state businesses that enjoy a cost of living much below the standard in Connecticut. But even it allowed for minimal salary increases for the two previous years that our salaries were frozen. Based on the update, will you be instituting retroactive increases for 2008 and 2009?

Also, the job classifications are not "one size fits all". I recognize that desk audits can not occur in every Court, but you must be aware that every clerk's duties are not equal; many of us draft decrees and do legal research, even if we are not paralegals or chief clerks. Please allow provisions for clerks, without risking their employment, to have some say in their classification.

In conclusion, please realize that we clerks are not the financial burden in the probate courts. Consider us at least equal to Judicial Department employees. Although I have not been privy to their salary scale, I imagine, like their time-off schedule, it is more appealing than what is presently ours.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Elaine D. Johnson
Clerk, Wallingford Probate Court