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DANBURY, CT 06810

Probate Court Budget Committee
c/o Probate Administration
186 Newington Road
West Hartford, CT 06110

3 February 2010

Dear Judges Yamin, Marino and Knierim:

I would like to thank the committee for all their time and effort, for listening to all of our comments and questions at the meetings and for reading all of our correspondence. I know it is a difficult task to accomplish in a short amount of time. I ask that you take into consideration the following:

I am writing to the committee in regard to the proposed benefits package for the probate clerks. I am very concerned that many of the benefits provided for State employees are not even being considered for probate employees. The committee has only addressed a very small portion of benefits i.e vacation, sick time, personal time and holidays. Benefits such as deferred compensation, disability insurance, life insurance, long term care, tuition reimbursement, merit payments and longevity payments have not even been mentioned. I ask why not? At every assembly meeting and clerks seminar, I hear that the probate clerks are the backbone of the system, that we do wonderful work, that we help people at the most difficult times in their lives, etc., etc., etc. so I ask why are we being treated like second class citizens when it comes to benefits? If we are that important to the system why are we not being treated as such? Why are we being offered a watered down version of State benefits and not the entire package?

There are several clerks who have given many, many years of service to the probate court system. I, myself, have worked for 35 years at the Danbury Probate Court. I find it very disheartening that after all of these years of service we are not even being offered a package comparable to State employees or comparable to the packages of the municipalities we serve.

At the first committee meeting I attended, I asked Judge Knierim about bonuses. He stated that bonuses were a no because State employees do not receive bonuses. But I recently found out that State employees do in fact receive bonuses.....they receive merit payments and longevity payments. After some research I found that State employees are eligible for merit payments "to provide concrete and attractive financial rewards for meritorious achievement" and "that State employees with permanent status, who have completed at least 10 full years of service are eligible to receive a semi-annual lump sum longevity payment. The amount of the check is based on the length of service and salary as of April 1st and October 1st of the current year." If these are not bonuses, what are they? And whatever you may call them, why are they not being offered to us? Are our merits and longevity not as good as State employees?

At the last committee meeting, holidays were discussed and it was discovered that some towns, while they have the same amount of holidays as the State of Connecticut, close on a different schedule so the proposal did allow for that. However, it does not allow for additional days the town may be closed. The question was posed to Judge Knierim and he mentioned that a personal day would have to be used. If the town is closed and we cannot go to work, why would one be penalized a personal day for this closure? It does not make sense.

Regarding vacation and sick time. The amount of days adopted by the budget committee are very generous, however, I ask that the committee reconsider the way an employee earns such benefits. I ask that the compression time adopted be changed to that suggested by the Clerks Association as it seems more appropriate for everyone based on years of service. I also ask that the committee reconsider how vacation and sick time are accrued especially for 2011, a year of transition. It would be a great hardship for all clerks not to start out with vacation or sick time at the beginning of the year and have to accrue days as the year progresses. As it stands now, clerks start out with whatever days are allotted to them in January and can use them as they wish during the course of the year. To change this without a chance to accrue for the next year would be a great burden for everyone. Please reconsider this.

At an earlier committee meeting Judge Yamin advocated for a separate bereavement policy. It is a benefit no one wants to have to use but it would be a great comfort to know that if the need arises one does not have to forfeit sick or personal days to take care of an immediate family member's affairs or attend a close family member's funeral. Please reconsider making this a separate benefit.

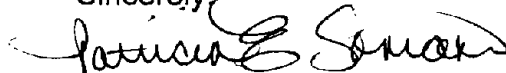
I would also like to mention a concern about the new and improved salary study. Which, by the way, isn't much improved. The new salary study suggests a 1% increase and it does not mention anything about COLA increases. While our salaries have been frozen for the past two years, State employees received a previously contracted 3% increase. Even with furlough days it works out to about a 1.8% increase. State employees are also afforded COLA increases. But there is no mention of COLA for probate clerks. Connecticut is one of the most expensive states to live in, prices go up on a daily basis (but our salaries do not), gasoline, for example, consistently ranks at the top or near the top of all the states in the Union, but yet our salaries remain stagnant. I would ask that the committee consider these factors when working on salaries and classification of jobs.

State employees have a contract as do employers and their employees in all types of employment. I think it is important for a contract to be drawn up with the Clerks Association to insure our benefits package once it is finalized.

After attending the last few committee meetings and listening to my fellow clerks speak about what is fair and what is not fair, it occurred to me that maybe the question shouldn't be what is fair or what is not fair but what is the right thing to do. I respectfully ask the committee to consider what is the right thing and to please do it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Patricia E. Saviano, Clerk
Danbury Probate Court