

Probate Court Budget Committee

Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 8, 2014
5:00 PM

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

The meeting was convened at 5:05 p.m.

In attendance: Judge Paul Knierim, Probate Court Administrator and Chair; Judge Joseph Marino and Judge Fred Anthony.

Public Comment and Correspondence

Pat Saviano, Chief Clerk, Danbury Probate Court and President of CAPC
Mary MacGregor, Chief Clerk, Glastonbury-Hebron Probate Court
Tamara Egan, Lead PCO, New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court

Discussion of Compensation Study Preliminary Findings

Compensation consultant Fred Owen of Owen-Pottier, Inc. joined the meeting by phone to report on the progress of the compensation study. Two of three phases of the study are complete.

In the first phase, Mr. Owen spent a full week observing and interviewing court staff to gain a complete understanding of all staff positions. He verified the accuracy of the existing job descriptions and used the Willis job evaluation system to develop a numeric value for each position. The Willis system, which the Connecticut Executive and Judicial Branches also use, is a tool to objectively evaluate jobs based on four principal criteria:

- What knowledge and skills are needed to be able to do the job?
- What is the employee's authority to make decisions?
- What is the complexity of the issues the employee faces in performing the job?
- What is the employee's accountability for outcomes?

In the second phase, Mr. Owen conducted a survey of organizations with positions that are similar to the Probate Court staff positions. The survey participants were six court systems in neighboring states with probate jurisdiction and seven Connecticut law firms with probate practices. In addition, the consultant has identified several comparative positions from the Connecticut Judicial and Executive Branches. The consultant also solicited participation from local social service agencies with positions similar to the PCO and Lead PCO positions but did not receive enough responses for a statistically reliable sample.

Mr. Owen presented updated charts summarizing the survey data. In the period since his September 17 presentation to court staff and judges, Mr. Owen added several Judicial Branch positions. He also incorporated data on the average actual rates of pay for each Connecticut Probate Court position (supplementing the prior charts, which showed the market (mid) rates. For most Connecticut Probate Court positions, the average pay rates exceed the market rates.

Mr. Owen emphasized the importance of comparing actual job duties (and, where available, Willis job values), rather than job titles, because title usage varies among employers. He indicated that the study is focused exclusively on pay rates and does not consider benefit packages. He noted that many of the surveyed law firms and some state court systems do not offer benefits comparable to the Connecticut Probate Courts.

The third and final phase of the study is an in-depth analysis of the survey data to develop recommendations for adjustments to the compensation system. The twofold objective of the study is to ensure competitiveness in the labor market and internal equity among the various positions within the Probate Court system.

Results of Merit Pay Adjustments

Andrea King gave a report on implementation of the July 2014 merit pay adjustments. The annual cost of the adjustments was \$350,000, in line with budgeted amounts, and 293 staff members received merit increases.

Employees whose pay exceeds the maximums for their positions are grandfathered and therefore ineligible for merit pay. The number of grandfathered employees has declined from 39 in January 2011 to 11 at present.

Office Budget Adjustments

Andrea King outlined proposed office budget adjustments for two courts.

The Stamford Probate Court proposes a transfer from Other Expenses to Education/Seminars/Meeting in the amount of \$280 for fiscal year 2015. The purpose of the transfer is to cover an expense that was incurred during the preceding fiscal year. The court had sent payment during the prior fiscal year, but the vendor failed to cash the court's check. The proposal would not increase the court's total budget.

The New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court proposes a transfer of \$1,771 from Office Furniture and Equipment to Coffee/Tea/Holiday/Special occasion for fiscal year 2014 to cover the expense of a 10 year anniversary reception at the court. The proposal would not increase the court's total budget.

Judge Anthony made a motion to approve both transfers. Judge Marino seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Court Staffing Levels

The Farmington-Burlington Probate Court requests an increase in benchmark staffing of 0.4 FTE for the Assistant Clerk position. Judge Knierim indicated that he had reviewed the court's needs with Judge Daly. He recommends the adjustment given that the court's workload statistics have for three years remained at a rate that justifies an increase to its staffing level. The committee noted that the court's workload is disproportionately high relative to population in part due to the fact that there is a hospital with a large psychiatric treatment department located in the district.

The Cheshire-Southington Probate Court proposes to eliminate a 0.5 Court Assistant position (currently vacant) and reallocate the time to the Clerk position. The change does not increase the court's overall benchmark staffing level and combines two part-time positions into a single full-time position.

The Northeast Regional Children's Probate Court seeks to eliminate a 0.4 FTE Court Assistant position (currently vacant) and reallocate the time to the Assistant Clerk position. The change does not increase the court's overall benchmark staffing level and results in a single full-time Assistant Clerk Position.

Judge Marino made a motion to approve the staffing level changes. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

None.

Schedule Next Meeting

The next meeting of the committee will be held on December 3, 2014 at 5:00 p.m. The compensation consultant will attend to present his recommendations for adjustments to the compensation plan. His written report will be circulated in advance of the meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:08 p.m.