

# **Probate Court Budget Committee**

Meeting Minutes  
November 6, 2013  
5:00 p.m.

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

The meeting was convened at 5:00 p.m.

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

## **Public Comment and Correspondence**

The committee received the following correspondence:

Letter from Judge Terrance Lomme, Saybrook Probate Court  
Email from Trudy Feddersen, North Central CT Probate Court

Those offering remarks:

Judge John McGrath and Chief Clerk Kelley Gamache, Windham-Colchester Probate Court  
Chief Clerk Evan Brunetti, Farmington-Burlington Probate Court and Vice-President of CAPC  
Chief Clerk Pat Saviano, Danbury Probate Court and President of CAPC

## **Remarks by the Chair**

Judge Knierim indicated that the agenda for the meeting is focused primarily on the committee's annual responsibilities under Regulation 28 to adopt a compensation and benefits plan for the coming calendar year and office budgets for the coming fiscal year.

He noted also that proposed amendments would update Regulation 28 to reflect completion of the transition to centralized financing and better align the annual meeting schedule with the budget process. The proposed amendments are currently pending before the Judiciary Committee of the General Assembly and he expects the revised regulations to be effective on December 18, 2013.

Judge Knierim joined with Judges Marino and Anthony to express support for the CAPC request that we seek to equalize the health insurance rates paid by Probate Court employees with the rates paid by state employees. He noted that the Budget Committee cannot itself make the change because the issue is governed by statute, but indicated

that he would like to work in partnership with CAPC and the Probate Assembly for passage of legislation to change the statute.

### **Report on Internal Pay Equity Study and Merit Pay Adjustments**

Andrea King reported that the internal pay equity study was implemented for the June 13, 2013 payroll, covering the pay period that begin on May 25, 2013. Of the approximately 300 employees who were eligible, 130 staff received a salary adjustment (43%). The cost to the system is \$472,000 annually.

Merit pay adjustments were processed in the July 11, 2013 payroll. The annual budget impact is \$320,000.

### **Implementation of 2014 COLA**

The committee previously approved a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for calendar year 2014. The COLA will be implemented in the January 9, 2014 payroll, which covers the pay period beginning on December 21, 2013.

Judge Marino made a motion that the committee approves the 2014 compensation and benefits plan as follows: the new compensation ranges embodying the 3% COLA, the planned merit pay adjustments in July, and the pay and benefits memorialized in the PCA policy manual. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Guidelines for FY 14/15 Office Budgets**

The committee discussed the chart titled "Office Expense Budget FY 2015 Proposed Budget Assumptions" included in the meeting materials. The suggested budget categories and amounts are unchanged from the current fiscal year.

Judge Marino made a motion to approve the budget guidelines. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Revised Policy No. 502 - NCPJ Conference Fee**

The committee reviewed a proposed revision to PCA Policy No. 502 "Miscellaneous Office Expenses: Annual Budget Process and Definition of Expense Categories." The revision replaces existing language that caps the NCPJ conference registration reimbursement at \$175 with a provision capping the reimbursement at 50% of the early registration fee.

Judge Anthony made a motion to approve the revision to Policy No. 502. Judge Marino seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

## **RFP for Compensation Consultant to Review Pay Ranges**

Judge Knierim initiated discussion on a plan to review the pay ranges for all of the Probate Court staff positions. Judge Knierim stated that, since the pay ranges have not been reviewed since 2011, he recommends engaging a new compensation consultant to take a fresh look at comparable market data for the positions. He indicated that PCA would use a competitive bidding process to select a new compensation consultant, with the goal of having the results available for the fiscal year 2015-16 budget planning cycle. Any adjustments to the pay ranges would be implemented in July 2015. Judges Marino and Anthony both expressed support for proceeding with the review.

## **Policy on Compensation of New Hires**

The committee resumed discussion of the compensation policy for new hires. Judge Knierim presented a draft revision to Policy No. 301 that would permit a court to pay a new employee whose qualifications exceed the job requirements up to 10% above the minimum for the position.

Committee members noted that the rate of turnover in the system does not indicate a need for a policy change and also expressed concern over the impact on current employees who were hired at minimum. It was the consensus of the committee that the primary emphasis should be to review the pay ranges to determine whether adjustments are needed.

The committee took no action but indicated that it may revisit the issue in the future.

## **Other Business**

### *Judge Lomme Staffing Level Request*

Judge Lomme submitted a letter requesting authority to reclassify an employee from assistant clerk to clerk. Judge Knierim summarized the letter.

Judge Anthony moved to table the matter. Judge Knierim called for a vote. Judge Anthony voted yes and Judges Marino and Knierim voted no. The motion failed.

Judge Knierim indicated that he did not support the request because authorized staffing levels should reflect an appropriate balance between the assistant clerk and clerk positions at each court. To add a clerk position would cause the court to be disproportionately high at the clerk level. He stated that it is not our practice to base decisions about authorized staffing levels on the qualifications of individual staff members.

The committee took no action on the request.

### *Trudy Fedderson Email*

Judge Knierim inquired whether the committee wished to discuss the current policy under which retirees are ineligible for COLAs, which Trudy Fedderson raised in her email. It was the consensus of the committee that the issue had been thoroughly analyzed at prior meetings and did not warrant reconsideration.

### *New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court*

Judge Knierim announced that a recently retired judge is assisting the Administrative Judge as an employee at the New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court. The Administrative Judge is not receiving compensation for serving in that role.

### **Schedule Next Meeting**

The committee established the following dates for its schedule of regular meetings for 2014:

March 5, 2014  
June 11, 2014  
December 3, 2014

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 PM.