

Regular Meeting of the
Probate Court Budget Committee
Minutes

Wednesday, December 9, 2020
5:00 p.m.

Office of the Probate Court Administrator
186 Newington Road
West Hartford, CT 06110

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas. The meeting was conducted in-person and by telephone conference.

Present: Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas, Probate Court Administrator and Chair, Judge Fred Anthony, Judge Philip A. Wright, Jr. Also present: Lisa Hansen, Director of Financial Services.

Public Comment and Correspondence

Public comment was opened and inquired by roll call to each Probate Court.

Remarks by the Chair

Compensation Plan Adjustments

Merit Pay Compensation

Lisa Hansen reported that the merit pay adjustments have been implemented as approved.

Cost of Living Adjustment ("COLA")

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked that historically, a COLA is presented for approval at the regular meeting of the committee in December if financial conditions of the system can support such an adjustment. Based on current revenue projections, Judge Streit-Kefalas recommended that the Budget Committee approve a 3% COLA for all court staff effective January 2021. Judge Streit-Kefalas cautioned that the Probate Court system budget as well as the state budget remains challenging and that significant deficits in revenue are projected for FY22 and FY23.

Motion

A motion was made by Judge Wright to approve a 3% COLA as presented. Judge Anthony seconded the motion.

Discussion

Judge Wright recognized the court staff for their hard work under unprecedented circumstances and supports the implementation of a COLA.

Judge Anthony is in favor of the proposal and agreed that the committee wants to properly compensate the staff while acknowledging financial concerns that lie ahead.

Judge Streit-Kefalas stated that a COLA is important to balancing compensation with continuing increases in living expenditures and is pleased that the budget is presently in a stable situation so that the committee may proceed with approval.

A vote was called by Judge Streit-Kefalas and all voted in favor of a COLA of 3% to be implemented in January 2021.

Emergency Compensation Plan

Judge Streit-Kefalas acknowledged the rising COVID-19 infection rates predicted by public health officials following the Thanksgiving holidays and remarked that it is more important than ever that in our personal lives but also in our work environment, we adhere to strict social distancing of 6 feet or more, mask wearing, frequent hand washing and wiping down commonly used equipment.

Judge Streit-Kefalas stated that an additional way to prevent the spread of the virus is a continuation of the Emergency Compensation Plan which authorized emergency compensation if judges elected to implement a staff and judge cohort schedule in the courts. Updated guidance from the Department of Public Health provided that so long as the judge remains in his or her office and has no in-person interaction with the staff, keeps at least 6 feet away at all times, and wears a mask, it is acceptable to have the judge excluded from the cohort. Based on this guidance, Judge Streit-Kefalas recommended an extension of the Emergency Compensation Plan approved on November 24, 2020 for the pay periods ending 12/25/2020, 1/08/2021 and 1/22/2021 with the modification that judges may be excluded from a designated cohort.

Motion

Judge Wright moved that the Emergency Compensation Plan as modified be continued until January 22, 2021. Judge Anthony seconded the motion.

Discussion

Judge Wright remarked in favor of the recommendation. The public health information is alarming. The option to establish a cohorting plan for the time period proposed is responsible and protects the health and safety of court staff while ensuring continuity of court operations. It is important that judges have the discretion to implement a plan that is appropriate for their court staff and court operations.

Judge Anthony remarked in favor of the plan that takes measures to protect staff and ensures viability of the courts while permitting judges the discretion to determine what works best for their courts and the flexibility to be excluded from the cohort.

Judge Streit-Kefalas called for a vote and all voted in favor of the Emergency Compensation Plan as modified for pay periods ending 12/25/2020, 01/08/2021 and 01/22/21.

Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2022 Office Expense Budgets

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked that the FY22 proposed budget guidelines for office expense budgets reflects the same guidelines as in the past.

Motion

Judge Anthony moved to affirm the FY22 Guidelines for Proposed Budget Assumptions for Office Expenditures as presented. Judge Wright seconded the motion.

Judge Streit-Kefalas called for a vote and all voted in favor of FY22 Guidelines for Proposed Budget Assumptions for Office Expenditures as presented.

Staffing Level Adjustments

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked in favor of the change to benchmark staffing requested by Judge Darby, Greater Manchester Probate Court, to eliminate the position of court assistant and add the position of assistant clerk.

Motion

Judge Wright moved to approve the request of Judge Darby to eliminate the position of court assistant and add the position of assistant clerk. Judge Anthony seconded the motion.

With no discussion raised on the motion, Judge Streit-Kefalas called for a vote and all voted in favor of the motion.

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked in favor of the request by Judge Marino, Middletown Probate Court, to increase benchmark staffing based on weighted workload to add one full-time assistant clerk.

Motion

Judge Anthony moved to approve the request of Judge Marino. Judge Wright seconded the motion.

With no discussion raised on the motion, Judge Streit-Kefalas called for a vote and all voted in favor of the motion.

Other Business

None

Set 2021 Meeting Schedule

The committee established the schedule of regular meetings for 2021 to be held at the Office of the Probate Court Administrator at 5:00 p.m. as follows:

March 9, 2021, June 16, 2021, and December 8, 2021

Adjournment

Judge Anthony moved to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Judge Wright. The meeting was adjourned at 5:52 p.m.