

Probate Court Budget Committee

Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 3, 2014
5:00 PM

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

The meeting was convened at 5:04 p.m.

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

Compensation Study

Compensation consultant Fred Owen of Owen-Pottier, Inc. made a detailed presentation on the results of the compensation study. The purpose of the study is twofold. First, the salary survey determines the competitiveness of the existing compensation system for Probate Court staff in comparison to other organizations that have comparable staff positions. Second, the study provides the basis for recommended adjustments to make the compensation plan both competitive and internally equitable.

The survey included Connecticut law firms that practice in the probate field, other northeastern state court systems with probate jurisdiction and the Connecticut Judicial and Executive Branches. 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.

The findings indicate that the Connecticut Probate Court pay ranges, when compared to law firms and other states, are very competitive in the entry level positions but less competitive in more senior positions. The Judicial Branch pay rates are significantly higher than the Probate Courts and more competitive than Connecticut law firms and other states.

Based on these findings, Mr. Owen proposed 3 options for adjustments to the Probate Court pay ranges, each of which would increase current rates of pay. He recommends that the percentage increases be in addition to the 3% cost of living adjustment scheduled for January 2015, but adjustments should be prospective rather than retroactive.

Option 1: Increase the market rate for all positions by 2% to increase competitiveness.

Option 2: Increase the market rate for positions on a graduated scale. Option 2 would increase entry level positions by 2% (the same as option 1) and more senior positions by varying percentages to address both competitiveness and internal equity. The largest recommended increases are for the Assistant clerk, Probate Court Officer and Lead Probate Court Officer positions.

Option 3: Add an additional 3% to the results of option 2 for all positions to further improve competitiveness.

In addition, Mr. Owen recommended that the pay ranges would be extended at the maximum level. Maximums under the current plan are 16% higher than market. Under the recommend plan, the maximum would be 20% higher than market.

Judge Knierim invited those in attendance to comment and ask questions. The following individuals offered comment:

Judge Sydney Elkin, West Hartford Probate Court and President-Judge of the Probate Assembly
Vera Mason, Lead PCO, Hartford Regional Children's Probate Court
Tamara Egan, Lead PCO, New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court
Mary MacGregor, Chief Clerk, Glastonbury-Hebron Probate Court
Pamela Griffin, Clerk, Tobacco Valley Probate Court
Evan Brunetti, Chief Clerk, Farmington-Burlington Probate Court and Vice-President of CAPC

The committee discussed the consultant's recommendations. All three members expressed support for adopting both options 2 and 3, which together would address the identified internal inequity issues while establishing the most competitive pay ranges. Committee members noted that the recommendations can be implemented only with an increase in the general fund appropriation for the Probate Court system. The amount of the appropriation will be determined during the upcoming legislative session. Depending on the results of the budget process, it is possible that the recommendations will need to be implemented in phases.

Judge Knierim moved that the committee approve, subject to available funding, options 2 and 3 set forth in the project report of Owen-Pottier, Inc. dated December 2014, with the understanding that adjustments to pay ranges and rates of pay for individual employees will be determined immediately after adoption of the biennial state budget for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 and approval of the fiscal year 2016 budget for the Probate Court system. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Judge Knierim indicated that the committee would reconvene in March to discuss the details of how adjustments to the pay ranges would translate to adjustments in the pay of individual employees. He noted that the committee will need to adhere to the same ground rules as were applicable during the 2013 internal equity study. As a result, employees whose pay exceeded the target pay calculated in the equity study may

receive a smaller percentage increase than employees who were at or below target at that time.

Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2015-16 Office Budgets

Andrea King presented proposed guidelines for court office budgets for fiscal year 2015-16. The guidelines would be identical to the current year, with the sole exception of the "Dues" line. The proposed revision would eliminate funds for Probate Assembly dues from the office budget to comply with a finding by the State Auditors. Judge Knierim indicated that the assembly is currently reviewing its organizational structure and funding as a result of the audit. Once those issues are resolved, funding for the assembly would be paid directly from the Probate Court Administration Fund.

Judge Marino made a motion to approve the guidelines for the Fiscal year 2015-16 office budgets. Judge Knierim seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. Judge Knierim and Marino voted yes and Judge Anthony abstained. The motion passed.

Other Business

None

2015 Meeting Schedule

The committee set the following schedule for 2015.

- March 4, 2015
- June 10, 2015
- December 2, 2015

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.