

# **Probate Court Budget Committee**

Meeting Minutes  
February 27, 2013  
4:00 p.m.

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

The meeting was convened at 4:04 p.m.

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

## **Public Comment and Correspondence**

The committee received the following correspondence:

Letter from Judge Timothy R. E. Keeney of the North Central Probate Court

## **Remarks by the Chair**

Judge Knierim reported that the budget process is off to a good start. PCA's proposed general fund appropriation for fiscal years 2013-14 and 2014-15 is incorporated into the Governor's proposed budget in the full amount requested. This amount includes necessary funds to implement the pay equity study and COLA and merit raises for court employees for the next two fiscal years. It also includes funds to cover pay increases for judges, which would occur automatically if the legislature increases the salary for Superior Court judges. The next step in the process is the Appropriations Committee review of the Governor's proposal.

The Labor and Public Employees Committee held a public hearing on February 26, 2013 on RB 6417, An Act Concerning Probate Court Employees. The bill was introduced at the request of AFSCME and would require court employees to be state employees and permit employees to unionize. Judge Knierim submitted testimony opposing the bill on the ground that individual courts would lose control over the selection and supervision of employees and other important decisions such as employee work schedules.

## **FY 2013-14 Office Expense Budgets**

Andrea King explained the proposed office expense budgets for the 54 probate districts and 6 regional children's courts. The proposed expenses are comparable to last year, with the exception of a significant increase for the Waterbury Regional Children's

Probate Court due to the decision of the city of Waterbury to terminate support for these items.

Judge Marino made a motion to approve the fiscal year 2013-14 office expense budgets. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Compensation Policy Issues**

### *Promotions*

The committee discussed whether to update the policy regarding pay adjustments for promotions in light of the anticipated end of the pay freeze. Under current policy, an employee who is promoted receives minimum for the new position or the employee's current rate of pay, whichever is greater. As a result, an employee whose compensation is more than the minimum for the new position receives no raise, despite taking on more responsibility.

Judge Knierim suggested that a reasonable policy would be to adjust a promoted employee's pay by one year's merit increase, equivalent to a 3-4% raise. Employees who receive the increase would be eligible for subsequent COLA or merit increases, regardless of the timing of the promotion.

The committee concluded that no special rules would be needed for employees who are promoted to a position that is more than one step higher than the current position (e.g., an assistant clerk promoted to chief clerk), since the minimum for the new position is likely significantly higher than the current rate of pay. For an employee whose pay is grandfathered because it exceeds the maximum for his or her current position, promotion pay would be calculated on the basis of maximum for the current position.

PCA will draft an amendment to Policy 101, Compensation Adjustments, for the committee's consideration at the next meeting.

### *New Hires*

Current policy requires that all new hires start at minimum pay. Some courts have indicated difficulty in hiring more experienced employees at these rates. The committee discussed the possibility of amending the policy to permit courts, on an exceptional basis, to pay a higher wage for a new employee whose experience exceeds the minimum requirements by a significant amount. Committee members expressed concern about paying a new employee more than incumbents and agreed that a formula approach would not be appropriate. The committee asked that PCA research the Judicial Branch's policies. The committee will discuss the topic again at a future meeting.

## **Other Business**

### *Flexible Spending Accounts*

Andrea King presented Policy 117, which memorializes the new flexible spending account benefit. The new policy is effective on March 1.

### *Security Initiatives*

Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas has established a Court Security Committee, which will be chaired by Judge Anthony DePanfilis. The PCA budget request includes funds for additional security measures at the courts.

### *COLAs and Merit Increased for Retired-Rehired Employees*

The committee confirmed that retired employees working part-time are not eligible for merit and COLA raises because retirees receive a pension that includes COLAs. PCA will amend Policy 101 to include explicit language on this issue. Judges may, but are not required, to conduct performance evaluations for retired rehires.

### *Lead PCO Evaluation Criteria*

The committee reviewed the draft performance evaluation criteria for the new lead PCO position.

## **Schedule Next Meeting**

The committee's next meeting will be on May 15, 2013 at 5:00 PM.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 PM.