

Probate Court Budget Committee

Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 10, 2015
5:00 p.m.

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

The meeting was convened at 5:01 p.m.

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

Remarks by Judge Knierim

Judge Knierim gave a brief overview of the state budget situation and its effect on the Probate Courts. The budget eliminates the general fund appropriation for the Probate Courts and offsets the cut, in part, with fee increases. The net result is a \$3 million shortfall for fiscal year 2015-16. Judge Knierim indicated that planned staff compensation adjustments continue to be the committee's top priority and that, to achieve that goal, the system will need to reduce expenses in other areas.

Public Comment and Correspondence

Pat Saviano, Chief Clerk, Danbury Probate Court and President of CAPC
Pamela Griffin, Assistant Clerk, Tobacco Valley Probate Court

2015 Merit Pay

The committee previously approved 3% funding for the 2015 merit pay increases. The process to allocate merit pay has been delayed because final approval of the Probate Court system budget will not occur until the legislature has finished the state budget process. The merit pay allocation process will resume when the budget has been approved. PCA anticipates processing merit pay increases for the pay period beginning July 4th or July 18th (pay dates of July 23 or August 6), depending on the timing of budget approval. Adjustments will be made on a prospective basis.

Compensation Study Implementation Policies

The committee previously discussed the proposed Compensation Study Implementation Policies at its meeting on March 4, 2015. The purpose of the policies is to establish how changes to the pay ranges for each position will translate into changes to the rates of pay for individual employees.

Judge Knierim proposed that the compensation study adjustments be phased in over two years in light of the budget shortfall.

Following discussion, Judge Marino made the following motion, subject to budget approval: (1) adopt the Compensation Study Implementation Policies; and (2) phase in the compensation increases over two fiscal years by implementing one-half of the increases in the fall of 2015 and the other half in the fall of 2016. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously. A copy of the approved policies is attached to these minutes.

The process to implement the first phase compensation study adjustments will be delayed by approximately one month, likely late November, due to the budget situation.

Adjustments to Fiscal Year 2015-16 Office Budgets

Judge Knierim presented a revised office budget for the Northeast Regional Children's Probate Court to reflect savings of \$36,150 achieved by moving the court from a leased facility to Windham town hall.

Judge Marino made a motion to adopt the revised NERCPC Fiscal Year 2015-16 office budget. Judge Anthony seconded the motion. Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Judge Knierim proposed that the committee revise the office budgets for all the courts to eliminate the coffee/tea/holiday/special occasion line item as a cost saving measure. He indicated that PCA will also terminate these expenditures.

Judge Marino made a motion to approve the elimination of the coffee/tea/holiday/special occasion budget line in the Fiscal Year 2015-16 office budgets. Judge Knierim seconded the motion. Following discussion, Judge Knierim called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Employee Paid Benefits

Andrea King presented information on extending to Probate Court employees the short- and long-term disability insurance benefits that are available to state employees. The benefit is optional and the cost is paid by the employee. The state is currently in the process of seeking bids for the program. PCA will report back to the committee when the state has completed that process.

Andrea King reported on PCA's evaluation of a simplified sick bank under which employees could donate time to an individual who has exhausted his or her own sick time. PCA recommends against the program due to the following concerns:

- Privacy issues that arise when solicitation of donations causes an employee's health issue to become made public.
- Inconsistent outcomes for employees who seek donations of time.

- Cost disparities associated with the donation of time by employees with lower rates of pay to employees with higher pay rates.
- Challenges associated with determining whether an illness qualifies for use of the sick bank

Based on these concerns, the committee will not move ahead on a sick bank.

Other Business

Judge Knierim described two additional actions that PCA will take to address the budget shortfall:

- He will notify courts that PCA will require advance approval before a court can fill any staff vacancy. PCA will work with courts to determine the most efficient manner to fill the vacancy, with an emphasis on filling available hours with full-time staff. The budget committee will be available to resolve any problems that arise with this process.
- Temporary staffing authorizations will be limited to emergency and urgent needs. Existing temporary staff authorizations that do not meet this level of need will not be renewed and PCA will work with courts to terminate longer-term authorizations by the end of September.

Schedule Next Meeting

A tentative meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2015 at 5:00 p.m. to review the compensation study calculations.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Compensation Study Proposed Implementation Policies

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Proposed Policies

GROUP 1 – Employees hired PRIOR to January 5, 2011 who were below their target rates and received equity adjustments in 2013 (116 employees):

Increase the hourly rate of each Group 1 employee by the compensation study percentage for the employee's position.

GROUP 2 – Employees hired PRIOR to January 5, 2011 who DID NOT receive an equity adjustment in 2013 because their hourly rates at the time were higher than the equity study rates (90 employees):

First calculate an updated equity study rate by adding all COLA and merit raises to the 2013 equity study rate. Then calculate the compensation study hourly rate for each employee by applying the compensation study percentage for the employee's position to the updated equity study rate. The employee will receive the greater of the compensation study hourly rate or the employee's current rate.

GROUP 3 – Employees hired PRIOR to January 5, 2011 who were grandfathered because their hourly rates were higher than the maximum (17 employees):

Calculate adjustments for Group 3 in the same manner as Group 2.

GROUP 4 – Employees hired SINCE January 5, 2011 who were hired at the minimum for their positions (71 employees):

Increase the hourly rate of each Group 4 employee by the compensation study percentage for the employee's position.

The adjustment will apply to employees who were hired before July 1, 2015. Employees hired on or after July will receive an increase to the new minimum for the position.

GROUP 5 – Employees hired SINCE January 5, 2011 who were hired ABOVE the minimum for their positions (8 employees):

On September 28, 2011, the budget committee adopted a policy requiring new hires from outside the system to start at the minimum for the position. Several employees were hired above minimum before the policy became effective. Calculate the compensation study rate for these employees by applying the compensation study percentage to an adjusted hourly rate equal to the sum of the minimum for the position plus all merit and COLA increases.

GROUP 6 – Rehired retirees (16 employees):

Make a one-time adjustment to standardize rates for rehired retirees at the following updated market rates, provided that the rate does not exceed the employee's pre-retirement rate of pay:

- \$25.79 Clerk
- \$22.74 Assistant Clerk
- \$18.83 Court Assistant

Temporary and floating clerk positions held by rehired retirees would be treated as Assistant Clerk positions.

PROMOTIONS

If an employee in Group 2, 3 or 5 was promoted on or after January 5, 2011, calculate the adjustment as if the employee was hired at minimum in the original position and add the promotion increase, along with the COLA and merit increases, before applying the compensation study factor.