

Probate Court Budget Committee
Minutes
Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Call-In Meeting hosted by the Office of the Probate Court Administrator
186 Newington Road, West Hartford, CT

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 p.m. by Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was conducted as a call-in meeting to ensure social distancing to protect against the spread of COVID-19 and to allow all courts to offer public comment.

Present: Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas, Probate Court Administrator and Chair, Judge Fred Anthony, Judge Philip A. Wright, Jr.

Public Comment and Correspondence

Correspondence to the Committee was disseminated prior to the meeting. Public comment was opened and inquired by roll call to court personnel in each individual court. Comment by Judge Magistrali was deferred until the agenda item regarding the Torrington Area Probate Court request.

Remarks by the Chair

Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas remarked that throughout the public health and civil preparedness emergency declarations by the Governor, the goal of the Probate Court Budget Committee has been to protect the physical and fiscal health of court staff while ensuring public safety and the continued operations of the Courts. Judge Streit-Kefalas expressed profound gratitude and pride for the work of the courts in meeting the needs of our citizens during these unprecedented times.

Judge Streit-Kefalas reported on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial stability of the probate court system and the status of the Special Session of the legislature as it relates to the Probate Court budget.

Judge Streit-Kefalas shared the letter of the Chief Court Administrator Judge Patrick L. Carroll III dated May 28, 2020 approving the fiscal year 2021 expenditures and his comments therein.

Compensation Plan Adjustments

Emergency Compensation Plan

In response to the continuing declarations of public health and civil preparedness emergencies by Governor Lamont due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the proposed emergency compensation

plan for the pay period beginning June 13, 2020 and ending June 26, 2020 was circulated and is summarized as follows:

- Court staff members, other than temporary employees and rehired retirees, who work in the Probate Court at least seventy-five (75%) percent of their regularly scheduled hours during the pay period will be compensated for the balance of their regularly scheduled hours under the C19 Facility compensation code.
- Court staff members, other than temporary employees and rehired retirees, who do not work in the Probate Court at least seventy-five (75%) percent of their regularly scheduled hours during the pay period are not eligible for the C19 Facility compensation. Such court staff members will be compensated for actual time worked in the Probate Court and may use available personal time and vacation time for the balance of their regularly scheduled hours, with the advance approval of the judge. COVID-19 Personal Time cannot be used during this pay period.
- Court staff will continue to have uninterrupted health insurance coverage.
- Court staff members may be eligible for leave as provided in Policy 903 and/or under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).
- Temporary employees and rehired retirees will be paid for actual hours worked in the Probate Court.

Motion

A motion was made by Judge Wright to approve the emergency compensation plan as presented. Judge Anthony seconded the motion.

Discussion on the Motion

Judge Wright remarked that he is in favor of the proposed plan. There has been a fiscal impact of working at less than full capacity. This proposal provides for a brief transition period before the return to full capacity and allows for sufficient time as Courts complete any facilities retrofitting that may be needed for the safe return of court staff.

Judge Anthony remarked that he is in favor of the proposed plan as it presents a natural progression to the return to full staffing capacity.

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked that the proposed plan continues to ensure the physical and fiscal health of the court staff, allows for retrofitting of court facilities as may be needed, and is consistent with guidance from the State and the CDC.

A vote was called by Judge Streit-Kefalas and all voted in favor of the emergency compensation plan as presented.

Performance Evaluations

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked that 59 of 60 courts have completed the evaluations. Such evaluations are an important component of the employer/employee relationship to allow for professional feedback on job performance and goal setting. Given the current uncertainties of probate fee revenues, state budget deficit and potential reductions, and statutory adjustments to the Probate Court Fund, Judge Streit-Kefalas proposed deferral of any decision on merit adjustments at this time.

Judge Anthony and Judge Wright agreed that deferral of any decision is appropriate.

Request of Torrington Area Probate Court for Temporary Staffing

Judge Magistrali was granted permission to speak on his motion to direct the Probate Court Administrator to permit the hiring of temporary staff for the Torrington Area Probate Court.

Discussion

Judge Wright acknowledged the circumstances of vacancies in the courts.

Judge Anthony remarked that he is unaware of any authority of the Budget Committee to direct the Probate Court Administrator to take any action. As such, the motion before the committee is not proper.

Judge Streit-Kefalas remarked that based on the representations of the court, the staff of Torrington Area Probate Court is not presently working at their benchmark staffing level so the court is not eligible to hire temporary staff. Judge Streit-Kefalas defers response to a renewed request to the Probate Court Administrator at such time when existing staff is working at benchmark levels.

As the motion is not properly before the Budget Committee, no action was taken.

Adjournment

Judge Wright moved to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Judge Anthony. The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.