

**CT PROBATE ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
May 13, 2020**

Attendees: Judges Brandt, Daly, Darby, Schad, Maxham, Magistrali, Becker, Fox, Rowe, Marino, Forgione, Berkenstock, Blick, Calabrese, DeGennaro, Gardner Riordan, Randich, Barrett, McGrath and Wright, Probate Court Administrator Streit-Kefalas.

1. Call to Order:

The meeting was held via teleconference and was called to order at 9:45 AM.

2. Approval of the Minutes:

A motion was made by Judge Becker and seconded by Judge DeGennaro to accept the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of April 8, 2020. The motion passed by unanimous consent, with Judge McGrath abstaining.

3. Correspondence:

None.

4. Treasurer's Report:

Judge Magistrali indicated there was no report as there have been no expenditures since the March report.

5. Committee Reports:

Continuing Education

Judge Becker reported that the educational component of the June assembly meeting is cancelled due to the public health emergency. PCA will offer education via forthcoming webinars. The June and September meetings will likely be combined for a full day seminar in the fall 2020. The months of October and November are proposed for Judges' Institutes to satisfy the in-person educational requirements for judges. The Education Committee will meet on June 10, 2020 to iron out the schedule.

Ethics

Judge Magistrali reported that he reached out to committee members for recommendations on the review of the Code of Probate Judicial Conduct. He suggested one area to address is social media. Not many committee members responded but he will follow up for their input. Judge Magistrali will continue to send out ethics related information which has been well received by the judges.

Legislative

Judge Fox and Judge Rowe reported that Judge Streit-Kefalas and Melissa Riley have maintained consistent contact with legislative leaders to elicit support of a suspension of the automatic "sweep" of probate funds slated for June 30, 2020. PCA is also researching whether a "sweep suspension" by executive order would be viable. Judges Fox and Rowe are continuing to meet with legislative leaders to urge "sweep suspension" in a special session. Judge Rowe stated that 84% of the budget is funded by fee revenue which continues to decline precipitously. Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that she is concerned that a special session may not be held before June 30, 2020.

Judge Marino inquired about the status of the current budget. Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that at this point, our budget remains the same as last session. She confirmed that our

allotment is received quarterly and believes we have received it for the 4th quarter. It is unknown what will be the Governor's response to the State budget deficit and he may his rescission authority to address the state deficit.

Judge Fox said Majority Leader Matt Ritter is hopeful that the federal government will help with the State's shortfall.

Nominating

No report.

Planning

No report.

Procedures Review

No report

Public Information

No report.

Court Security

Judge Calabrese reported that he held a virtual meeting with his committee this past week. Nine courts have completed the security assessments. One court reported that as a result of the pandemic, they received needed security build outs. The next meeting will be in July.

6. Comments of the Probate Court Administrator

Judge Streit-Kefalas expressed her gratitude that courts are remaining open and serving the public. Courts have done an amazing job and this has been priceless for legislative support. The Budget Committee will convene a special meeting later today at 4:00 PM to address emergency compensation. Probate fee revenue continues on a downward trend but Judge Streit-Kefalas is cautiously optimistic that this will turn upward once we return to full staffing capacity.

Judge Streit-Kefalas also reported that she and Melissa Riley continue outreach with legislators. The legislators are aware that all Probate Courts have remained open with no public-facing interactions.

They are participating in the Governor's unified command calls on a daily basis, including weekends. The meetings are now reduced to 3 times a week. This is reflective of the overall flattening of the coronavirus infection curve.

Bonnie Bennet and Melissa Riley also participate in an ongoing Emergency Operations Center Legal Working Group comprised of counsel for all State Agencies.

All courts now have access to Cisco WebEx for audio and video conferencing with the emergency purchase of camera-enabled monitors coordinated by the IT Department team led by George Fernandes. Many judges contributed feedback on experiences with the system.

Judge Streit-Kefalas reminded judges that nursing homes have been distributed iPads to facilitate visitation for residents and they may be an option to utilize for nursing home hearings.

Future guidance for courts is tied to budget committee meeting. Judge Streit-Kefalas reminded everyone that courts are not closed- just closed to the public. She encouraged judges to look at the Governor's Reopen CT Sector Rules for May 20 re-opening of offices to ensure proper social distancing recommendations. Judges should seek out municipal officials for court needs to comply with sector rules. FEMA and COVID-19 relief funds may be available to municipalities that request financial assistance for any necessary retrofitting of facilities.

PCA has obtained an initial supply of disposable face masks from the State emergency center to be sent out to courts. Courts will be responsible for procuring future supplies going forward with their municipal supplies budgets.

7. Comments of the President-Judge

Judge Brandt stated that he is looking forward to serving as President. He commended judges and staff in their efforts to keep courts open in order to accomplish tasks over the past weeks.

He expressed his thanks to Judge Streit-Kefalas and Melissa Riley for their efforts. Press packets sent out by Melissa with positive articles were favorably received by legislators. He commended judges to keep up the good work in communicating with legislators to sustain our funding.

Judge Brandt reported that he has plans for the next year or two but with current budget concerns, his short term goal to be act as a liaison between Judges and PCA, Judge Streit-Kefalas and the executive committee. He hopes to be available to resolve concerns and issues and implement some small changes. Judge Brandt looks forward to working with everyone.

8. Other Business to come before the Executive Committee

Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that the educational component of June Assembly meeting will be cancelled but Assembly Bylaws require a meeting every quarter. It was agreed that the assembly meeting will take place by teleconference on June 16, 2020 @ 9:45 AM.

9. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by Judge Wright, seconded by Judge Becker and unanimously approved. The meeting ended at 10:43 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Kathleen N. Maxham
Recording Secretary