

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
July 8, 2020

Attendees: Judges Blick, Brandt, Darby, DeGennaro, Forgione, Fox, Gardner Riordan, Maxham, McGrath, Randich, Schad and Wright, and also Probate Court Administrator Judge Streit-Kefalas, Manager of Communications and Intergovernmental Relations Melissa Riley, Chief Counsel Bonnie Bennet.

1. Call to Order:

Due to the continued public health emergency, the meeting was held remotely via Cisco Webex video conferencing and was called to order at 9:47 AM.

2. Approval of the Minutes:

A motion was made by Judge DeGennaro and seconded by Judge Blick to accept the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting of June 10, 2020 as presented. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

3. Correspondence:

Judge Brandt reported the only correspondence he received was from Judge DeGennaro regarding the business of a new ad hoc committee in connection with effect of COVID-19 on judge's education and other regulations that was addressed at the last meeting. Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that there was no correspondence to the Office of the Probate Administrator for the Assembly.

4. Treasurer's Report:

Judge Magistrali filed financial reports for the months of April, May and June and a final report for July showing no new expenditures since the March 2020 report. In the absence of Judge Magistrali, Judge Streit-Kefalas confirmed that there were no expenditures since the March report. Judge Darby moved to approve all reports as presented, seconded by Judge DeGennaro and unanimously approved.

5. Committee Reports:

Continuing Education

Judge Brandt reported that the committee had a few telephone conference meetings. The committee is addressing in-person seminars. Bonnie Bennet is reaching out to Chief Justice Robinson to determine whether his presentation will be feasible as a remote seminar. There will likely be Webinar-style seminars for the remainder of the year in lieu of the in-person programs. The committee is meeting on July 20, 2020 to plan consolidated educational seminars and will provide an update at the August Executive Committee meeting.

Judge Forgione inquired about the original seminar dates of September 24 and October 27. Bonnie Bennet confirmed that since there is no appropriate venue space that can be reserved, the seminars may be conducted remotely and will likely be for shorter durations of 1 to 2 hours. The dates have not been set.

Ethics

Judge Brandt reported that Judge Magistrali continues to keep judges informed about ethical concerns and forwards formal decisions that are relevant. Most recently judges received an email decision regarding social media.

Legislative

Judge Fox reported that he is continuing to wait and see if there will be a special session. Judge Streit-Kefalas and Melissa Riley are doing a great job continuing to keep the governor's office and legislature informed of our needs.

Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that she, along with Judge Carroll, attended a Legislative Appropriations Committee Public Hearing via Zoom on July 6, 2020 that focused on the functioning of the court systems and budgetary issues. Judge Streit-Kefalas shared with the Committee that very early on because municipal buildings were closed, the probate courts were able to ensure safety of staff and public by restricting contact with public but remain operational. She reported to the Committee that we rolled out Cisco Webex audio and video hearing platform very early on. She felt that the members of the Appropriations Committee understand and highly value the Probate Courts' role in traditional times but also appreciate the Probate Courts' responsiveness during the pandemic and the swift deployment of Webex video conferencing.

Nominating

No report.

Planning

Judge Forgione had no report and announced his retirement as chair of this committee. Judge Brandt thanked Judge Forgione for his service to the Assembly and Executive Committee.

Procedures Review

No report.

Public Information

No report.

Conservator Guidelines

No report.

Court Security

Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that the committee continues to meet with its next meeting on July 13, 2020. Judge Calabrese encourages all courts to complete the security assessment. The safety measures put in courts for the pandemic have also in some cases enhanced security measures. Judge Brandt echoed the sentiment to communicate with municipalities about courts' needs in this area.

Floating Clerks

No report.

Hospitality

No report.

6. Comments of the Probate Court Administrator:

Judge Streit-Kefalas reported that she attended a public hearing before the legislature's Appropriations Committee. She stated that she, Melissa Riley, Lisa Hansen, Judges Rowe and Fox have had ongoing telephonic meetings with legislators. Legislators are very well aware that all 60 courts have been open throughout pandemic. They are aware that Probate Court revenue has declined. Judge Streit-Kefalas remains cautiously optimistic that it is deferred and not lost revenue. The trajectory with respect to our probate administrative funds, because sweep was not suspended on June 30, means that our general fund appropriation needs will be much greater going into the next biennial budget cycle.

Judge Streit-Kefalas stated that she appreciates the legislative leadership especially the Chairs of Appropriations Committee for giving Probate Court system the opportunity to be on the record about the work of the probate courts, especially during public health emergency, our funding needs and the savings that we offer the State of Connecticut. Judge Streit-Kefalas referred to the yellow bubble chart with the compilation of savings that probate courts offer. Last year the savings was \$700 million a year. That number updated to 2020 dollars including an increased caseload shows a \$1.5 billion savings to the State. It is an incredible number that has been shared with the legislature. This bodes well for future funding.

Judge Streit-Kefalas expressed appreciation for judges and all court staff. She and Melissa will be asking for feedback from each court re: opening of municipal buildings. Probate Court Administration wants to support each court. Re-openings may ebb and flow, Phase 3 has been delayed due to national COVID numbers. She has not received much feedback about retro fitting needs and she trusts that silence means municipalities have stepped forward. She asked judges to reach out to Melissa or her if courts need guidance or support.

Judge Streit-Kefalas continues to meet with DCF quarterly. DCF continues to perform assessments. DCF as well as other State agencies are continuing to work from home but are making great efforts to ensure the safety of our children throughout the state.

Our fee revenue continues on a downward trend but it is flattening. That is a good sign. Judge Streit-Kefalas asked judges to maximize the number of hearings held as it is critical to avoid a significant backlog, but is also important for the public that we continue to process all matters timely.

7. Comments of the President Judge:

Judge Brandt thanked everyone for participating via Webex or on the telephone. The Ad Hoc Committee (unnamed as yet) to review standards and regulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic has been established. Weighted workload, educational requirements and certification of hours will be addressed. Judge Brandt has asked Judge Dorval to be chair of the committee and had reached out to other judges to serve on the committee. Pete Smith is also willing to assist with legislative needs.

Judge Brandt reported that he and Sue Dornfried have put together a list of committee member responses and will be locking up committee membership and chairs in the next few weeks. He again thanked Judge Forgione for his service on Planning Committee and service to the Executive Committee.

Judge Brandt reported that August 12 is the next meeting. There will be more information from the Education Committee regarding seminars at that time. As we slowly return to normal, please stay safe and enjoy the summer.

8. Other Business to come before the Executive Committee:

None

9. Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Judge Gardner Riordan, seconded by Judge Wright and unanimously approved. The meeting ended at 10:16 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Hon. Kathleen N. Maxham
Recording Secretary