

CONNECTICUT PROBATE ASSEMBLY MEETING
April 21, 2021

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Judge Brandt at 11:03 a.m.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance** was led by Judges Kepple and Dorval.
Judge Brandt recognized Judges Kepple, Dorval and Clebowicz who will be retiring this year.

Roll call of the Judges

Thirty-seven judges were present by Cisco Webex video conference for the meeting, including Probate Court Administrator Judge Streit-Kefalas.

Also present: Chief Counsel Heather Dostaler, Attorney Evan Brunetti, Melissa Riley.

Judge Brandt introduced the guests and recognized the assistance of support staff at PCA for enabling the meeting to be held via Cisco Webex.

3. **Remarks of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court**

Judge Brandt introduced Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson as the guest speaker. Justice Robinson spoke gratefully of his partnership with Judge Streit-Kefalas during the past year. He spoke about the superior services delivered by the Probate Courts during the pandemic. He quoted an old African proverb: "If you want to move a mountain tomorrow, you must start by moving the first stones". He thanked the Assembly for a job well done.

4. **Approval of the January 27, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Judge Gardner Riordan moved and Judge Daly seconded a motion to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **Report of the Treasurer**

Judge Magistrali presented the Quarterly Treasurer's Report for the period from January 2021 through March 30, 2021 reflecting the budget adopted at the last annual meeting and showing no expenditures. Judge Darby moved and Judge DeGennaro seconded a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Judge Magistrali recognized previous Judges who served as treasurer for the Assembly. He then presented the proposed budget totaling \$35,000 for the next fiscal year from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. The proposed budget has been the same since fiscal year 2017-2018. Judge Wright moved and Judge Dorval seconded a motion to approve the budget as proposed. The motion passed unanimously.

Judge Brandt thanked Judge Magistrali for his years of service as treasurer since this is his last meeting in that role.

6. **Committee Reports**
Continuing Education

Judge Brandt delivered a report prepared by Judge Becker. In the report the Committee including Attorneys Bonnie Bennet and Evan Brunetti and the IT Department from PCA were recognized for their tireless efforts in modifying and delivering continuing education programs to the judges and staff with the Webex platform. Efforts are still ongoing to provide short webinar topics. Thanks to all who have contributed.

Ethics

Judge Magistrali reported that the Ethics Committee has not met but he reviewed the Committee's charge which is to conduct a periodic review of the Code of Probate Judicial Conduct and make recommendations for changes or additions when appropriate. The last time the Code was fully reviewed by the Committee was 2016 led by Judge Knierim. The Council on Probate Judicial Conduct created under C.G.S. sec. 45a-62 is the body charged with investigation of written complaints regarding probate judge conduct.

Legislative

Judge T.R. Rowe reported that we are in the throes of the legislative session now. The Probate Operations bill has passed out of the Judiciary Committee and is on the Senate's calendar. This is the long session and runs through Wednesday, June 9, 2021. The Committee is tracking bills of importance to Probate Courts. More legislative action will happen in the session in later weeks. He encouraged all judges to keep speaking with state legislators about the work of the courts.

Judge Fox reported that the Appropriations Committee votes on the state budget today. He noted that the Committee's recommendation is in line with the Probate Courts' budget request. The next six to seven weeks will be critical. He reported that other bills are being monitored, but nothing has passed into law as yet.

Nominating

Judge Marino explained that the purpose of the Committee is to recruit judges for positions for the Assembly. He is assisted by Judges Darby, McGrath and Barrett.

Planning Committee

Judge Anthony explained that the Committee's charge is to address the structure and the role of the Probate Court system. Due to the challenges of the past year, nothing has been referred to the Committee for review, discussion or action. He anticipates that in the coming year some matters will be addressed.

Procedures Review Committee

Judge Berkenstock explained the role of the Committee also known as the Forms Committee. The Committee is comprised of judges, clerks and PCA staff. The goal is to make forms as user friendly as possible. The Committee last met on March 1, 2021 and the next meeting is May 3, 2021. Please send all suggestions to her or Heather Dostaler.

Public Information

No Report

Judge Brandt reminded all of the virtual NCPJ Conference on May 12 at noon EST. Judge Yamin is co-chair of the curriculum for the conference. The program will be relevant to all judges.

7. Elections

Judge Marino asked for a vote for the following slate of officers that were presented at the January 27, 2021 Assembly meeting:

OFFICERS

TERM 2021-2022

President-Judge

First Vice President-Judge

HONORABLE MICHAEL R. BRANDT

HONORABLE EVELYN M. DALY

Second Vice President-Judge
Executive Secretary
Recording Secretary
Treasurer

HONORABLE MICHAEL M. DARBY
HONORABLE LEAH P. SCHAD
HONORABLE KATHLEEN N. MAXHAM
HONORABLE ROBERT A. RANDICH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Term: 2021 - 2024

Litchfield County
Middlesex County
Tolland County

HONORABLE MICHAEL F. MAGISTRALI
HONORABLE JEANNINE M. LEWIS
HONORABLE BARBARA GARDNER RIORDAN

BUDGET COMMITTEE

Term: 2021 - 2023

HONORABLE FRED J. ANTHONY

COUNCIL ON PROBATE JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Term: 6/2021 – 9/2025

HONORABLE MICHAEL F. MAGISTRALI
HONORABLE ELISA H. BARTLETT (*Alternate*)

Since nominations were closed by vote at the Assembly meeting on January 27, 2021, Judge Brandt conducted a voice vote and the slate was unanimously approved.

8. Remarks of the Probate Court Administrator

Judge Streit-Kefalas centered her remarks on gratitude. She stated that the annual meeting is a time to look at the past year in review. She thanked Justice Robinson and Judges Carroll and Bozzuto for their support over this last year. She spoke of the challenges of the past year; from the physical challenges and the financial challenges that were overcome that enabled the staff to be compensated throughout the year including receiving merit and cost-of-living raises. She recognized the IT department's efforts with computer monitor distributions to all courts and Webex accounts to allow hearings to continue. She recognized all members of the IT Department especially noting the loss of Sue Scott and the addition of Tim Helmecki.

Judge Streit-Kefalas also recognized the far too many losses we endured. She expressed gratitude for many memories. She mentioned Bonnie Bennet turning over the reins of the legal department to Heather Dostaler. She expressed thanks to Evan Brunetti, Amy Benjamin, Alison Green, and Stephanie Janes for their support; Melissa Riley for her role with the legislators and communications, Audrey for the Probate Press and biennial report; and all in the Financial Services Department. She expressed special gratitude for coordinating the annual meeting to Sue Dornfried and Evelyn Gonzalez.

Judge Streit-Kefalas also noted her appreciation of the special honorees, Attorneys Tim and Renee Wentworth and Judge Paul Knierim. They each have contributed in countless ways to our courts. She thanked the Assembly and court staff. She stated that the probate courts are the State's safety net's safety net.

9. Remarks of President-Judge

Judge Brandt thanked Judge John McGrath for recommending Tim and Renee Wentworth from Windham County for the pro bono award. He congratulated Chief Clerks Michelle R. Gunn of Plainfield-Killingly Probate Court and Diane K. Ely of Norwalk-Wilton Probate Court for 25 years of service. Judge Brandt reflected on the past year, noting the profound losses all have experienced with deaths and isolation. He stated that courts provide an outlet for grief for those under our jurisdiction. He opined that the unwritten purpose of our courts is guidance

and counselling to help family members and friends during difficult times. Our courts are general social service agencies to the residents of our state. He expressed his thanks to Judge Streit-Kefalas and the staff at PCA. Judge Streit-Kefalas faced lots of challenges in assisting our courts

so we were able to assist our residents and to keep hearings occurring during the pandemic.

Judge Brandt expressed special thanks to Judge Magistrali for his years of service as Treasurer for the Assembly. He also thanked all the officers who serve the Assembly. He expressed special thanks to all clerks and for the courts for the many accomplishments this past year.

10. Presentation of Service Awards to Clerks

Judge Carolanne Rowe from the Plainfield-Killingly Probate District proudly presented the 25 Year Service award to Chief Clerk Michelle R. Gunn.

Judge Douglas N. Stern of the Norwalk-Wilton Probate District proudly presented the 25 Year Service award to Chief Clerk Diane Ely.

11. Presentation of Glenn E. Knierim Pro Bono Award

Judge Brandt explained the background and purpose of this award. Judge McGrath recommended the award winners Attorneys Renee and Timothy Wentworth of Lebanon, CT. He described the attorneys as most worthy recipients of the award for their willingness to take on any matters for their local courts. The Wentworth's spent a few minutes expressing their gratitude for the award.

12. Presentation of Daniel F. Caruso Public Service Award

Judge Beverly Streit-Kefalas described this award and introduced the honoree, Judge Paul J. Knierim, a former legislator, Probate Judge and Probate Court Administrator. Judge Knierim spent a few minutes reflecting on the award and expressed his thanks and honor for selecting him.

13. Any business to come before the Assembly

None

14. Adjourn

Motion was made by Judge Wright, seconded by Judge Daly and unanimously carried to adjourn at 12:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Kathleen N. Maxham
Recording Secretary