

Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants
Minutes of the April 17, 2014 Meeting
2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

It is the vision of the Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants to achieve the fair and efficient resolution of unmet legal needs.

In Attendance: Hon. Michele Snowberger (Chair), Erin Farris, August Swanson, Abby Brown, Ed Higgins, Lisa Mecklenberg-Jackson, Casey Smart, Janice Doggett, and Kate Kuykendall.

All present took roll. Snowberger opened the floor for public comment on non-agenda items; there were no public comments.

August moved to approve the minutes. Abby seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Dissolution Form Progress

The forms subcommittee has a Dissolution With Kids forms packet that is in the vetting process. The committee hopes to present the forms to the district court judges in May. The forms have been well-received thus far, and are available on Central Desktop. Anyone who wants to view them is welcome to review them and make comments. It's a large packet, and is not easily emailed. The goal is to move to a public comment period in June, and be wrapped up in September when the new Court Help Program staff come on board.

The forms subcommittee will meet April 18 using GoToMeeting at 2:45 PM. All are welcome. Smart agreed to review the Dissolution With Kids packet to provide a clerk's perspective.

Clarification for MCA 40-4-220(1)

The SJ 22 interim committee is welcoming proposed statutory changes, as long as they are very specific. The Court Help Program and this Committee have an on-going list of issues and obstacles for SRLs. One item that could be revised clearly is MCA 40-4-220(1), which provides the process for amending a parenting plan. Farris, on behalf of the Court Help Program and the Committee, will provide a memo requesting clarity for the service procedure under this statute, and proposing a statutory amendment. The Committee will then vote on the proposal by email.

Janice suggested notifying the ATJC Policy and Resources Committee.

Trainings

- (a) COLJ Clerk Training. The Committee's presentation at the Clerk Training was well received. It included a summary of the Committee's and ATJC's work, and left time for a discussion of the Committee's survey. This presentation could potentially be automated, replicated, and/or posted on an appropriate website. Erin will send one version of the presentation to the Committee for review.

- (b) The Committee is scheduled to do presentation for District Court Judges on May 15 at the Judges' annual meeting. The presentation will include a review of the Dissolution With Kids

forms packet, and will solicit feedback from judges on how to avoid making SRLs fill out high volumes of information on multiple forms.

- (c) NY State Courts Access to Justice Program. Mecklenberg-Jackson secured a grant that allowed Farris and Snowberger to attend a two-day program in New York on access to justice. Snowberger described the experience, which included a visit to the Bronx Family Court. Farris will send out a recap of the experience. The Committee discussed ideas that may be relevant to Montana, and also discussed common challenges.

The Committee briefly discussed the value of sharing information with public librarians, which is something Montana is doing that groups in other places find useful.

Access to Justice Commission Report

Snowberger gave a brief summary of the activities of the Access to Justice Commission since the last meeting of the Committee. The Commission met on February 28, and formally adopted a committee structure and strategic plan. This Committee was way ahead of every other committee in its planning. The Commission will meet on June 25th jointly with the Justice Initiatives Committee. Justice Baker advised that this Committee should move forward with its Strategic Plan as proposed.

Strategic Plan Implementation

Snowberger requested comment from the Committee on ways to move the Strategic Plan forward, noting that around 75% of its goals are marked as high priority. Snowberger noted there are 4 emphasis areas under the Strategic Plan, and that the data-gathering report is waiting for someone to pick it up and move it to completion.

Farris suggested the Committee identify people who are interested in 1 or more emphasis area and create working groups for each.

Farris agreed to serve on the Self Help Resources and Tools area.

Brown and Smart agreed to work on Education and Training. Snowberger remarked that there are some tools available that may be useful to those working on this area, and that updating existing tools may be a good place to start.

Farris remarked that it would be wise to see if the clerks of Court want a representative of the Committee to attend or speak at the Clerk's meeting in June. Smart agreed to find out.

Swanson and Higgins agreed to work with Farris on the Self Help Resources and Tools area.

Mecklenberg-Jackson agreed to work on both the Collaboration & Communication and Legislative and Rule Changes areas.

Snowberger agreed to continue working on Self Help Resources and tools, and asked that each of the other groups copy her on communications and information exchange. She will join meeting of other working groups as she is able.

Snowberger reminded the Committee that each working group would be wise to pull in people from outside the Committee to share the work load. Each working group will be responsible for figuring out how it will meet and approach its work.

Swanson volunteered to serve as chair of the Self Help Resources and Tools working group.

Brown agreed to serve as chair for the Education and Training working group.

Brown left the meeting.

Mecklenberg-Jackson is the only member of the remaining two working groups, until additional Committee and non-Committee members are identified and agree to serve.

Farris remarked that Judge Ortleby will likely be interested in working on Education and Training, and that Randy Snyder will likely want to work on the Legislative and Rule Changes area. Pam Poon would be good on the Education and Training area, or the Collaboration and Communication Area. Kim Dumond would be good at Education and Training, and would provide a valuable Justice Court perspective. Judge Tanner's tribal perspective would be valuable on the Collaboration and Communication group.

Each working group chair will contact the members not present and invite them to the working groups noted by Farris.

Snowberger requested proposals for goals in each emphasis area by June 10, so that there will be time to incorporate them into a report to the Commission by its June 25 meeting.

New Business

There was no new business.

Next Meeting

The Committee will meet on Thursday, June 12, from 2:00 – 4:00 PM.

Higgins moved to adjourn. Smart seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 3:11 PM.