

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

Minutes of the June 12, 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, Randy Snyder, Abby Brown, Ed Higgins, Kim Dumon, Pam Poon, Janice Doggett, Mike Palzes, Patt Leikam.

Introductions and roll call. Snowberger opened the floor for public comment on non-agenda items; there were no members of the public present and no public comments.

Approve Minutes: Motion to approve minutes of April 17, 2014 was made and seconded. Motion carried.

National Center for State Courts A2J Report: Erin was in attendance and noted that Montana was not highly ranked in the use of “on line scoring.” States are ranked by services available to self represented litigants, disability accommodations, access to attorneys and language/communication barriers. Information is available and a link will be provided for actual review of report. A copy of the OCA comment memo in reference to rating will be provided by e-mail. Janice indicated the National Conference Access to Justice Commission uses a research template providing an independent resource for scoring tool vs information tool. Montana does not experience many of the scoring parameters that larger states experience, which results in our lower rating. The Justice Index is very informative and should be reviewed. Erin will forward OCA comments and link.

Self Help Resources and Tools Working Group: It was reported the SCSRL Strategic Plan and Priorities is on the website. The immediate high priority goals are currently being introduced, created and reviewed.

Goals: The creation of a “survey monkey” will start with particular information gathered from judiciary, family law attorneys, mediators and staff. The continued development of resource tools will be in partnership with “Justice for Montanans” assisting, developing and identifying information for usage by self represented litigants and SHLC staff.

In areas of “support,” and “permanent funding,” the committee recommends members observe SHLC operations, have discussions with SHLC staff concerning interactions with Judges, OCA and Clerks of Court. View the SHLC operations with assistance to customers. These observations will be discussed at the next meeting. In reference to permanent funding a media fact sheet is in development and will be sent to committee members for perusal. A consistent message will be collaborated and be integral to an advocacy strategy with other committees and OCA.

In considering the improvement of access to sponsored programs including pro bono programs, increased outreach to the public is a high priority. Continued development of ongoing education for clerks of court and judicial staff will improve SRL access. Currently in review “difference between legal information and legal advice.” Advocating for SHLC’s housing in courthouses will be considered when possible.

Form Sub-Committee: Committee members were thanked for their 60-90 monthly hours over several months devoted to the revision of the “Dissolution with children Packet.” The packet is now ready for public comment, feedback will be gathered from Judges, Family Law attorneys through State Bar and staff a link will be circulated for comment along with a description of process. Instructions will be created after comment period. Complete

instructions and new forms packet will be available September 1st. Next revision process will include Guardianship packet, Name Change packet, Debt Collection Packet, Joint Dissolution Packet and Parenting Plan Packet. Committee members were appreciative of the revision commenting the information is better formulated and looking forward to comments. Distribution strategy will be posting through Court Help Update, direct e-mails to District Court Judges, Clerks of Court, Mediators (send to Pam for distribution) and State Bar contacts. Specific goals concerning the process, estimated times of packet completions and processing schedule will be evaluated during this time. Standing committee will need direction as to how forms will be approved.

Education and Training Working Group: Working collectively together compiling inventory available for ongoing education. Reviewing how to update education and training specifically Legal Advice vs Legal Information, Best Practices and create opportunity for Public Awareness. Primary focus is to provide Clerks of Court with requested training. Next phone meeting is in August, 2014.

Collaboration and Communication – Legislative and Rule Changes – Planning discussions with other areas to facilitate a collaborative message to legislators is in the process.

Discussions with IT getting Portal is in process, completing Executive Summary, discussions concerning incorporating Interim Rules are currently being discussed. Most recently court rules with Judicial Canons have adopted ABA Standards.

New Business: Snowberger will request the Access to Justice Commission to Adopt the Strategic Plan and Goals and provide “point” persons from other standing committees to participate.

Montana Legal Services has been invited to apply for a TIG (Technology Initiative Grant) to develop new automated templates for SRL family law forms; MLSA has requested a letter of support from this committee.

Motion: Moved to provide “letter of support,” for MLSA. Seconded. Motion carried.

Next Meeting: Phone meetings will be scheduled when necessary, electronic votes will be by email if necessary, quarterly meetings will be by phone, video or in person at State Law Library. Next quarterly meeting will be September 18, 2014, Thursday, 2pm-4pm.