

Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission
March 8, 2019
Large Conference Room, Office of the Court Administrator
301 S. Park, Third Floor, Helena, MT
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Justice Beth Baker, Georgette Boggio, Hon. David Carter, Rick Cook, Aimee Grmoljez, Hon. Leslie Halligan, Dean Paul Kirgis, Hon. John Kutzman, Katy Lovell, Dan McLean, Alison Paul, and Melanie Reynolds.

Commissioners Absent: Ed Bartlett, Rep. Kim Dudik, Sen. Terry Gauthier, Kyle Nelson, Melissa Schlichting, and Hon. Stacie Smith.

Others Present: Hannah Cail, Brian Copeland, Patty Fain, Ann Goldes-Sheahan, Nolan Harris, Sarah McClain, John Mudd, Derrek Shepherd, Debbie Steigerwalt, Tara Veazey, Hannah Wilson, and Niki Zupanic.

Call to Order & Introductions

Justice Baker called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Justice Baker asked for corrections on the December meeting minutes. There were no corrections. Alison Paul moved to approve the December minutes and Melanie Reynolds seconded. The minutes were approved without objection.

Legislative Update

Justice Baker provided an update on the 2019 Civil Justice Improvement Act. The House Judiciary Committee heard the bill in late January. Justice Baker said the bill hearing went very well and the witness testimony in support was very compelling, but the committee members would not support the filing fee increases and voted against the bill, 10-9. The legislation is a revenue bill and has a later transmittal deadline, but there still does not appear to be a path forward and the bill is likely dead. Justice Baker said the group working on the bill is regrouping and the Policy & Resources Committee will be meeting on May 13 to discuss next steps after the session. Alison Paul noted that it took seven tries to pass the legislation creating state funding for domestic violence legal services.

Montana Legal Services Association Update

Alison Paul reported on the new federal grants that MLSA was awarded at the end of last year, resulting in MSLA hiring 12 new people. MLSA has restructured its supervision and hired two new directors, who will be starting soon. The other new hires included adding new attorneys and filling positions that had been vacant. Alison shared that MLSA also has a new partnership with the Aging Services Bureau to hire an elder abuse attorney. Alison also reported on several technology projects that MLSA is working on. MSLA is continuing work on a website for crime victim services and expects it to be launched within this year; refreshing the Law Help website to improve search functionality and update content; enhancing the AskKarla online advice platform; and extending rural videoconferencing services with the Court Self-Help Centers. Alison said the

Domestic Violence Working Group had been on a short break while MLSA added new staff, so there is no current update from the group, but it should be meeting again soon.

Rural Incubator Project for Lawyers

Hannah Cail reported that the RIPL program received five applications for its inaugural cohort of Fellows and she shared the backgrounds of the two participants who were selected. The initial “boot camp” CLE is taking place this week, with experienced attorneys serving on panels about ethics, data security, business practices, and other topics. Additional CLE programming will be offered throughout the program and the Fellows will begin providing pro bono hours through MLSA. The program is also connecting the Fellows with mentors and modest means referrals.

Self-Represented Litigants Committee

Nolan Harris reported on the committee’s family law forms project. He thanked the judges and masters who offered their feedback and said the parenting plan and final decree forms are getting ironed out with more plain and user-friendly language. Final drafts will be ready in May and will be shared at the judges’ conference, with a survey also going to all judges. Nolan expects the project will be done in June. He thanked Hannah Wilson, a clerk for Justice Sandefur, and Anisa Ricci, a Justice for Montanans AmeriCorps Service Member serving at the State Law Library Self Help Law Center, for their help with collecting feedback on the forms. Nolan welcomed others to join the form subcommittee’s meetings and calls.

Self Help Video Project

Hannah Wilson and Sarah McClain reported on a new project between the Law Library and the Court Self-Help Centers to create a series of videos to familiarize self-represented litigants with the centers and the legal process. The first videos are now available on [the Court’s YouTube channel](#) and on the Court’s website. They said more videos are to come and welcomed ideas for video topics. They then played one of the videos, which shares best practices for filing documents in Montana district courts.

Strategic Planning Committee

Niki Zupanic provided an update on the grant received from the National Center for State Courts for the “Justice for All Project” to support the Commission’s strategic planning effort and introduced Tara Veazey, the consultant selected to facilitate the project. Tara directed the group to the slide deck at Tab 3 of the meeting packet. Tara shared the progress of the strategic planning committee’s Justice for All work. The committee reviewed the project work plan and reserved nine months of the project for implementation of a handful of items to be determined by the Commission at its June meeting.

Tara reviewed the first phase of the project, which is to conduct an inventory assessment. She reported she was in the process of summarizing the existing research and current data from the courts and MLSA. Tara will be surveying stakeholders and the committee will assess the results and analyze our strengths and challenges in each of the Justice for All assessment components. Tara reviewed those components and shared that more detailed descriptions of each component were in the meeting packet. The committee does not anticipate suggesting significant changes to the Commission’s recently adopted strategic plan, but will be back at the June meeting with the inventory assessment, any suggestions for refining the Commission’s strategic plan priorities, and

work plan options for the implementation phase of the project. Justice Baker said the committee will be meeting again on April 1 and will keep the other committee chairs updated.

2019 Biennial Report of the Montana Access to Justice Commission

Justice Baker shared that the Commission’s biennial report to the Montana Supreme Court is due this year. Niki Zupanic will be contacting the committee chairs to collect more information and will draft the report. Justice Baker asked members to watch for an email with the draft report for their review.

Public Comment and 2019 Meeting Dates

Justice Baker asked for public comment. There was no public comment. Justice Baker reviewed the 2019 meeting dates. The meeting was adjourned at 11:07 a.m.