

Access to Justice Task Force
Minutes
December 16, 2008

The Access to Justice Task Force met by conference call on December 16, 2008. In attendance were Justice Jim Burke, Judge Scott Skavdahl, Judge Tim Day, Rick Lavery, Walter Eggers, Sleeter Dover, Amanda Roberts, Dan Fleck, Leigh Anne Manlove, and Ronda Munger.

Order Establishing Access to Justice Commission

Justice Burke opened the meeting by informing the group that the Chief Justice had signed the Order Establishing the Access to Justice Commission. He applauded the group for their efforts, but then quickly reminded the group that the real work had just begun. The Task Force discussed how to fill the open positions on the Commission. Justice Burke expressed his opinion, and Rick Lavery concurred, that it would be best to use the members of the Task Force to fill as many positions as possible. Judge Skavdahl suggested the Task Force be sent an email to make sure they wanted to continue with their work and would like to be appointed to the Commission.

Conversation with Bob Rhudy

Justice Burke shared the conversation he had with Bob Rhudy, who works with the Center for Social Gerontology. Mr. Rudy advised that Wyoming gets some federal money that goes to the state department on aging. A percentage of that money (1-12%) is earmarked for legal services for the elderly. He thinks Wyoming is at the low end of the percentage and thinks that they in the past have given their dollars to WLS. Areas of legal help needed by the elderly are generally for: grandparent guardianships for children when parents can't take care of them e.g. drug problems, jail etc.; nursing home-assisted living issues, guardianships for the elderly, estate planning; consumer fraud and over billing from healthcare providers. Justice Burke discussed Wyoming's pro bono rules with Mr. Rhudy, who advised the model ABA rule is different in that it emphasizes direct representation. Mr. Rhudy also suggested the Task Force contact Terry Brooks of the ABA legal services committee, who has good ideas regarding pro bono support and program set up. Used the term "low bono", meaning legal services where they have to pay a small fee. Rhudy will be providing a law review article and other information to the Task Force.

Email regarding Pro Bono work

On December 8, 2008, Justice Burke sent an email to the Task Force to brainstorm about Pro Bono Service. Justice Burke explained the reason he asked the question and talked about his experience with the American Inns of Court and a discussion about pro bono work. Justice Burke explained he was surprised at the issues raised by the Cheyenne lawyers with regard to pro bono service. Sleeter Dover shared his experience with getting attorneys involved in pro bono work. He was disappointed and frustrated with his unsuccessful attempts to generate attorney interest in taking pro bono cases. He acknowledged that Wyoming rules already provide the opportunity for "low bono" work.

The Task Force agreed that pro bono service is just one piece of the legal services picture in Wyoming, but that it was not the solution. Judge Day suggested that emphasis should be placed on a coordinated effort of bringing together the service providers that already exist in Wyoming to more efficiently and effectively cover the issues and the state. Rick Lavery informed the group that the district court clerks are seeking an increase in filing fees, and he suggested that it may be beneficial to use part of the increased fees to fund legal services.

Next Meeting

Justice Burke agreed that by next meeting he will email all Task Force members to confirm an interest in being on the Access to Justice Commission. He requested ideas for how we proceed from here. The next meeting of the Task Force/Access to Justice Commission (AJC) will be January 13, 2008 at noon.