

**Access to Justice Commission
Minutes
December 7, 2016**

The Access to Justice Commission met at the Supreme Court Building on December 7, 2016. The members and guests attending the meeting in person, by video, or by phone were Justice Kate Fox (Chair), Chief Justice Jim Burke, Judge Tim Day, Judge Shelley Cundiff, Tori Kricken, Stuart Day, Amanda Roberts, Walter Eggers, Dona Playton, Sharon Wilkinson, Cathy Duncil, Kayla Spencer, Jessica Keith, Anne Sutton, Brad Bonner, Gen Tuma, Tenille Straley, Devon O’Connell, Ray Macchia, Angie Dorsch, Liz Hutchinson, Matthew Pappalardo, Lily Sharpe, Ronda Munger, and Becky Craig.

1. Welcome: Justice Fox welcomed the members and guests and noted that the main reason for the meeting was to view the two videos that were created by the Communications Working Group.

2. Reports from Working Groups

a. Delivery Working Group. Angie Dorsch reported on the following:

- **Volunteer Reference Attorney (VRA) Project.** The VRA project was implemented in Cheyenne in March and in Casper in November. The project will be expanded next into Sweetwater County and Sheridan County. Judge Cundiff noted that there is now space available in the Sheridan County Courthouse and the attorneys are ready to proceed in the spring of 2017.

- **Policy on Providing Assistance to Court Patrons.** An initial draft of the policy has been created. It will provide direction to court employees, court volunteers, law librarians—basically anyone who works for the courts—on what can and cannot be done when providing assistance to self-represented litigants. The draft will be circulated to the district and circuit court judges and clerks for feedback. The group is also putting together a training packet of in-depth information and resources that can be provided to new court employees.

b. Communications Working Group. Angie explained that the two videos, which are geared towards the public and attorneys, were created as part of a marketing plan that was adopted earlier in the year. Once minor editing is completed and titles and graphics about available resources are added, the videos will be finished. The videos were viewed and discussion was held about the content. Angie will set a meeting with the marketing consultant to develop a comprehensive strategy on who the videos should be directed to. Adbay will be contacted about creating short public service announcements from the videos. The group is also working with Adbay to create a logo. Justice Fox will assist with developing a communication plan that will convey the importance of the Access to Justice Commission’s mission to the

Wyoming Judiciary, the Legislature, other government leaders, and citizens of the state. Lengthy discussion was held about this matter. Chief Justice Burke urged the district judges and circuit court judges to establish subcommittees to focus on access to justice issues. Judge Day and Judge Cundiff will pursue this with their conferences.

c. **Law Improvement Working Group.** Amanda Roberts and Angie Dorsch reported on the following:

- **Mandatory Mediation & Guardian Ad Litem Appointments.** Courts that require parties to attend mediation and/or obtain a GAL for children in family law cases has been identified as one of the biggest barriers for low-income parties to have their family law cases heard by the court. The group's goal is to develop a system where these requirements may be helpful to the court without becoming barriers for the parties. Mediation training is being planned, and policies for mediators and GALs are being developed. The working group is planning to survey the district judges to get additional information on how courts are using mediation and GALs. Chief Justice Burke commented that it is essential that the district judges be involved in the conversation about mediation. Judge Day offered to develop a presentation for the District Judges' spring meeting regarding these topics.

- **Potential Revisions to Adoption Statutes.** The group is continuing to research and compare the termination of parental rights and adoption without consent statutes.

- **Custody/Child Support Statutes.** The group is continuing to review proposed changes to the child support guidelines that would result in a gradual decrease in child support, and also the recommendations to do away with child support abatement.

- **Procedural Efficiency.** A subcommittee of this working group is working on expanding the Rule 1 Committee's expedited divorce rules. Currently, the subcommittee is focused on the Alaska informal trial system. They had an informative conference call with Stacey Marz with the Alaska court system to discuss Alaska's experience in developing and implementing informal trials and also their early resolution program. They are putting 50% of their cases through to their early resolution program, and settling up to 80% of their cases on the court date. Alaska has had the same success rate in all of their courts, which include very rural areas as well as large urban areas. The subcommittee will initiate another phone conversation with the Alaska Administrative Office of the Courts to see how they established their systems.

- **Residency Requirement in Divorce Actions.** This procedural change to Statute 20-2-107 will be addressed at the upcoming legislative session.

d. **Funding Working Group.** Stuart Day reported that a meeting took place in November during which the group started a process to identify alternate funding sources for the projects of Equal Justice Wyoming and the EJW Foundation. Angie advised that a communication plan will be developed for pursuing state funding for civil legal services and for

communicating with other sources of revenue (private foundations and other donors). The group will research the methods that other states use for funding.

3. Achieving Justice for All

a. **Resolution on Pro Bono Policies and Procedures**. Angie explained that this resolution urges all lawyers and law firms (small, large, corporate, government) to do pro bono work, to provide their employees with the opportunities to do pro bono work, and to adopt strategies, policies, and procedures towards that end. Stuart Day moved and Angie Dorsch seconded a motion to adopt the resolution. The motion passed unanimously.

b. **Resolution on 100% Access Goal**. Angie explained that this is a resolution supporting the goal that all citizens should have access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs. She noted that it does not mean an attorney for every person, but supports the idea that there should be a way for every person to have their case heard before a court. This is also being supported on the national level by the Conference of Chief Justices. Walter Eggers moved and Chief Justice Burke seconded a motion to adopt the resolution. The motion passed unanimously.

c. **16th Annual National meeting of State Access to Justice Chairs—Equal Justice Conference**—Pittsburgh, PA. Brad McKim will attend this meeting on May 5-6, 2017.

4. Future Action Items

a. **Tribal Issues**. Angie is working with Stuart Day to schedule a meeting and develop outreach regarding tribal issues.

Meeting adjourned.