

The Connecticut General Assembly

Task Force to Improve Access to Legal Counsel in Civil Matters

Co-Chairs:

William H. Clendenen, Jr. / Timothy Fisher



c/o Judiciary Committee, Room 2500
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

LCCM@cga.ct.gov

Chairs Letter to Members Re: 8/4/16 Meeting

Thank you for a great first meeting last Thursday. We will try to capture in this letter the key points from our discussion and confirm our plans from this point forward.

We heard an excellent range of comments about the core mission of our Task Force. We have a consensus of its importance. This is certainly true with respect to the people of our state who need help on legal problems. But more broadly we appear to have a shared recognition that the overall fiscal and social health of our state depends on supporting and protecting those who suffer from life's dislocations. Too many people in our state are unable to function and contribute as employees, as consumers and as taxpayers because of civil problems that defeat and weaken them and their families.

Your input during our meeting informed our plans for organizing our efforts. At our upcoming August 25 meeting we will revisit our mission with the benefit of your continued input, based in part on your reflections from the materials we are circulating as background reading. Then we will charge several workgroups to address four major parts of our mission. Those are:

- Goals and principles: Why is this issue important? What are the reasons why civil justice is important for those who cannot afford legal counsel? Our discussion on Thursday's meeting suggests that it is a blend of several different considerations, including justice in individual outcomes, procedural justice, improving court operations, giving voice to the powerless, improving social outcomes, and legal and policy change.
- Dismantling the barriers: Addressing the barriers that keep people who need lawyers from accessing them. What explains the "market failure" between underemployed lawyers and people who need but do not have a lawyer? Economics are only a part of the problem; other barriers can be identified and reduced.
- Systemic change and dealing with demand as well as supply: Many legal problems arise because people have trouble navigating their way through bureaucracies. What can be done, both in the public and the private sector, to make it easier for people to find their way? How can we make bureaucracies more user-friendly, and reduce the need for lawyers in the first place?
- System Alignment and Modification: This working group will survey the field to identify approaches that are working here and elsewhere. What are the relative successes, and what are the costs of different approaches? And in particular, what can be accomplished by approaches that cross jurisdictional lines among civil, criminal, administrative and probate systems to address problems that have a common underlying social cause?

We ask each of you to volunteer for the workgroups. Please select both a first and second choice so that we will be able to sort out the membership for each and assign chairs.

Attached is an update of the preliminary schedule that we distributed Thursday. (Note that we have fixed the next meeting for Thursday August 25, 8 am, Room 2D at the LOB).

It was truly impressive to see the level of attendance at our first meeting, and that was before we even had all of our members appointed. The level of commitment you all show is heartening. We know that we will be able to put together a quality report. We look forward to a meaningful and illuminating engagement with the General Assembly to present recommendations that accomplish the intended goals of Special Act 16-19 while recognizing the constraints under which our state government must operate.

Thank you all; see you on the 25th.