

**Georgia Commission on Child Support
Technology/Calculator Committee
September 11, 2013
Minutes**

This meeting took place via conference call. Present on the call were:
Wendy Williamson, Chair
Ryan Bradley – Policy Unit at DCSS
Elaine Johnson, Staff
Pat Buonodono, Staff Attorney
Deborah Johnson, Attorney, Atlanta Legal Aid, Dekalb County
Phillip Laden, Attorney, Cobb County

The meeting was called to order at 10:33 a.m.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Ryan Bradley is filling in for Erica Thornton for today.

II. Review of minutes of the Committee's meeting on August 2, 2013 – motion to accept made by Phillip, seconded by Deborah. Minutes approved by vote.

Report on state contacts from NCSEA Conference – Elaine reported that there were no vendors present, so we came back with no information.

III. Discussion on calculator examples from ten other states and next steps.

Wendy reported that she spoke with Bill Bartells in Michigan, who has been in charge of child support calculations for the State of Michigan – their calculator was defunded but he is happy to help us. Mr. Bartells referred us to an attorney in Michigan, Craig Ross, who created the child support website in Kentucky – company called Marginsoft – has done calculators for other states as well.

Elaine spoke with Mike Monahan this morning; he is the director of the pro bono section of the State Bar. Mike is working on a project to create online forms for pro se litigants. What they are using is Access to Justice Author. You access Law Help Interactive to find it. He gave Elaine an email address for Claudia Johnson, we can talk to her about licensing and access to the product. He said GA Legal Aid already has some licensing for the A2J software. He directed her to Georgialegalaid.org and register as an advocate and use their domestic violence forms – those are A2J Author forms.

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Wendy asked the difference between Marginsoft and A2J. Deborah Johnson believes A2J is software for adapting forms to make them more accessible to pro se litigants. Mike Monahan is also an employee of Georgia Legal Services Program/Atlanta Legal Aid are the two nonprofit law firms that represent indigent people in Georgia. Atlanta Legal Aid covers five metro counties and GLSP covers the rest.

Phil Laden – Marginsoft is an actual program written by Craig Ross, but he is concerned that it is not a web based calculator. A2J is on top of the calculator so we would be supporting multiple programs. It would be more cost effective to have one program to maintain. Phil pulled up A2J while we were talking and it looks like it creates documents in Hot Docs. He will research further.

Pat mentioned the email received in response to the attorney survey from Judge Davis in Gwinnett County; he is concerned that he won't be able to edit a web-based calculator like he can with the Excel program. We need to add this to our list of necessary features. The old web based calculator did this but you had to remember the number it assigned. So another thing to add to the list of necessary features is an easier way to get back to the worksheet.

Wendy said if she created a worksheet she doesn't want the other side to have access to it. Judges should be able to edit worksheets without restrictions, if given the number.

Some discussion of the technology survey staff sent out to the family law section of the state bar, and modifying it for judges. We discussed adding a question regarding the old calculator. Pat will draft a survey for the judges and circulate it to the Committee.

Wendy asked if Marginsoft is Excel based. Phil responded that the program appears to be PC based and not web based.

Wendy asked Phil why web based is desirable. His response:

1. Allows people regardless of computer they have to be able to access a program; accessible from whatever device you have that can access the internet. Most judges and attorneys are using iPads and smart phones, etc. Also accessible between MAC and Windows.
2. Ease of maintenance.
3. Assures that everyone is working on the same version. Right now, you can run worksheets with same numbers as opposing counsel and come up with different numbers because one is using an older version of the worksheet.
4. Consistency. For training, he would bring an iPad, a desktop, a smart phone.

Deborah wants to consider problems we might run into for having a web based calculator so we can anticipate push back or resistance. For example, internet crashing and worksheet not accessible. Also wondering while we are talking about the importance of everyone using the same version at the same time, sometimes when dealing with appeals or looking back at something that was created in the past under the law that existed in the

past, it might be important to be able to access a worksheet that was created under the old version because that was how the law required it to be done at that time. Will we be able to access older versions of the worksheets?

Phil replied that was a problem when we had the original web based calculator. A lot of the rural counties had access problems. We need to check with all 159 counties and make sure they have public wireless access at all of the courthouses. Does the state have to offer public internet access in their buildings?

Phil addressed the issue of being able to go back and look for an old version. If there is a function that allows us to designate it as final, you could then save it on a server and come back to it later. What we don't want is having 4 or 5 versions stored on the server.

Wendy asked what features we feel are most desirable for our calculator.

- Elaine said we need help based features.
- Ability to save digital copy of the worksheet. Phil suggests .pdf format.

Elaine pointed out that the final is filed with the court, but Deborah stated the courthouse loses things all the time. We have to build a way to create a process so that someone designates the final worksheet .

Who is going to have the authority to mark something as the final version? If you rely on the clerk to designate something as final, it might never get marked or they might mark the wrong one. The judge's office would know which one really is final and should be the one to make the designation. We need to add a question on the survey about their willingness to do so. In the past the judges would not do it. They wouldn't do this with the Excel calculator either.

Phil is concerned that whether we do web based or Excel based, we are going to continue to have this specific problem. He suggests we flag this as a later topic, and move on. All agreed.

Wendy wonders whether we are looking to make one worksheet that everyone uses, or a pro se version or a lawyer/judge version. Phil would like to see if there's a way we could create one. Elaine and Wendy also favor one version. We do have limited funding so can't make the calculator too complicated. Wendy mentioned that judges and attorneys need one calculator that is less sophisticated. Phil wanted to know if someone could speak with a judge in one of the counties with an online calculator. Wendy says we need to speak Maria Lewis, in KY CSC. She may have this answer. Wendy will email her number.

- We need an end number; we have to have a paper at the end of it.

On the question of whether we want one calculator or separate calculators for attorneys/pro se litigants, Deborah believes we should not assume that one or several

questions are more cost effective. We should ask that question of whoever is developing the program. Her needs as a user are quite different from someone who only has to prepare one worksheet in their lifetime and has never seen it before. She does multiple worksheets for each case and we shouldn't assume that what works for one audience doesn't work for the other. So we need to actually ask about cost.

Wendy has another question – we have to fit our website to our statute. What do we call our people? She thinks that CP and NCP can be awkward.

She did note on one of the states that they had a section on shared and split parenting. Oklahoma has a “court view.”

Elaine noticed that none of the calculators we reviewed incorporated deviations. PA had a check box for deviations but it doesn't go anywhere. Utah creates a nice pleading and deals with the split and shared parenting.

IV. Presentation for Committee Meeting on September 27, 2013

So what do we want to recommend to the Commission?

Deborah asked what we are trying to accomplish? Wendy explained that the Commission has already approved our exploration of a web based calculator.

So what do we want to present to the Commission? Pat will be doing a demonstration of the current child support calculator. Do we want to show them Kentucky? Deborah is not convinced that their statute is similar enough to ours. We would have to make them understand where we are heading, but not that this will be our product.

Phil addressed the quality of the web based product in KY.

1. He is comfortable with the consistency; he ran several sheets to check it.
2. He ran some worksheets for some of his clients on their web based product. Except for deviations, the numbers came up within a few dollars of what they are here.

We just want to show the ease of use of point and click. Deborah feels that the Commission will misunderstand and think that this is what the final product would be. She might put up a copy of what we have now and illustrate why it's not serving our purposes just to have some kind of visual.

Wendy will contact Craig Ross.

Deborah pulled up Kentucky's law and wants it clear that KY's law is not like our law. Everyone was in agreement with that. Pat asked Phil if he would make this part of the presentation and Wendy asked if he would also answer any questions that might come up. Phil agreed.

V. Close of Meeting and Scheduling Next Meeting

Our next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 24, 2013 at 10:00 a.m., at the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.