

Minutes of Meeting
Georgia Commission on Child Support
Calculator/Technology Committee
March 14, 2014

The meeting was brought to order at 11:00 a.m.

Present:

Wendy Williamson, Co-chair

Philip Ladin, Co-chair

Deborah Johnson, Atlanta Legal Aid, Dekalb County

Ryan Bradley, Policy Unit at DCSS

Judge Brenda Weaver

Patricia Buonodono, staff attorney

Elaine Johnson, staff

Bruce Shaw, staff

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review/Approval of Minutes of Last Meeting

Philip Ladin began by giving an overview of the important points of the last meeting: Microsoft will discontinue support of the version of Excel for which the current calculator was designed and they are discontinuing support for Microsoft XP as well. This has forced the Committee to consider the future of the current calculator and to look for new options. Given the overall trajectory of technology the Committee has looked into the possibility of a web-based application because of its many advantages (e.g. working on any internet connected device, worksheet submission, data collection); however, after surveying some of the power users of the current calculator it was apparent that the State of Georgia's courthouses lacked in technological infrastructure to offer internet connectivity to the public. This revelation has steered the Committee into pursuing a hybrid solution; developing a web application and a downloadable application to be used offline as well.

The meeting was opened for questions or comments regarding the November 22, 2013 meeting minutes. Deborah Johnson commented that her colleague Megan Miller was not of the Dekalb County Atlanta Legal Aid office as identified in the minutes but rather, from the Fulton Atlanta Legal Aid office. The minutes were then amended to reflect this. Wendy Williamson moved to approve the meeting minutes from November 22, 2013 as amended. Deborah Johnson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

III. Old Business

a. Look at web based solution

Philip Ladin demonstrated an updated version of the web-based calculator proof of concept that was shown at the last meeting. It emulated the Excel data entry form with the intention of making a transition easier for users since they would already be familiar with look and feel of it. Data can be saved and retrieved at a later date for modification. Once a worksheet is completed and ready to be submitted to the court, it can then be made “public” for a judge to access it. This is accomplished by giving judges administrator credentials that would allow them to view all worksheets that have been made public in their particular county and to use a search query of their choosing to locate the worksheet (i.e., case number, plaintiff’s name, defendant’s name, children’s names).

b. Look at PC/Mac based solution

The downloadable application emulated the data entry form as well but has the distinct advantage of completing worksheets offline and uploading the information once an internet connection is available. Information entry fields were organized by tabs for efficient toggling from segment to segment. Data entered into the downloadable version is then stored in a local database inside of the program. Once the user is ready to submit a worksheet to the court he/she would have multiple options for submission: saving it to the online database once their device containing the worksheet is connected to the internet, transfer the worksheets via flash drive or email, or print out the worksheet to submit a physical document.

c. Plan for Excel calculator in the meantime

Philip Ladin outlined some of the problems with using the Excel Calculator: a large amount of attorneys are using outdated versions of the calculator, and every time Excel releases a new version issues invariably arise with the calculator. At the last Georgia Commission on Child Support meeting, Judge Abbot requested Philip Ladin research the possibility of acquiring a statewide license for Excel to eliminate many of the support issues for the calculator. Philip Ladin has not obtained an exact figure for cost of a statewide license but expects to have one for the next meeting.

Wendy Williamson pointed out that the internet connectivity issues are likely not a state issue but rather a county by county problem. She recalled when the Savannah Bar Association moved much of their membership access online, the opposition from members was strong but by moving ahead it forced the opposition to conform, which resulted in a much stronger membership base. Wendy then stated that by keeping with Excel nobody changes and problems will persist. Judge Weaver pointed out that there is a lack of authority to force these changes and that implementing a wireless system can be imperfect, citing her own courthouse as having

wireless internet but it being undependable on some days. This moved the topic back to the functional duality of the calculator designed by Philip Ladin.

Philip Ladin pointed out that an advantage of the proof of concept being shown is that they are actually the same application, just that one is designated to a website and the other as an executable file. This makes updates and fixes much easier because it only needs to be done once and it is done for both. Another huge advantage for the web calculator is the ability for it to be translated into another language at the click of a button. It could therefore easily be filled out in Spanish and submitted to the court in English.

Wendy Williamson introduced the concerns of Commission Chair Judge Abbot, who in a previous Commission meeting directed the members of this Committee that any changed needed to be seamless and final rather than transitional. Philip Ladin stated that these concerns arose from an earlier discussion of making a transitional offline application but now the focus has shifted to making the tandem solution a permanent one. Patricia Buonodono stated that with the approaching expiration of support for the version of Excel that the current calculator is built for and the timeline for developing a tandem solution, it was likely the Excel version would need to be rebuilt giving users additional time to adjust and switch to the online version.

Elaine Johnson illustrated some of the problems of the last calculator that would have to be addressed in the development of a new calculator: If the server hosting the calculator goes down the entire state is unable to calculate child support as well as judges having difficulty finding sheets due to user input errors. Philip Ladin pointed out that the previous vendor implemented the search function for judges incorrectly; it never had a true search function, it only allowed searches by one or two fields and did not display similar results.

Wendy Williamson posed the question of how counties are to pay for the inevitable technology expenses to keep up with either the appropriate Microsoft licenses or the wireless internet connectivity. Judge Weaver suggested that it comes from county library fees fund which tends to have a surplus after providing for the libraries which the statute states can be used for other county projects. Philip Ladin stated that expenses for counties are inevitable because upgrades are already needed for many counties just to run the Excel calculator.

Ryan Bradley stated that currently Microsoft was offering the office bundle to state and county employees for \$9.95 for a Home Use Program. This being very inexpensive it warrants a further look into the matter and how it might benefit with the states Excel problem. Elaine Johnson was asked to find out who the Administrative Office of the Courts has been negotiating with to receive this deal and report back to Phil for further research.

Deborah Johnson stated complete reliance upon internet to do child support calculations would be detrimental to the state overall, not just rural locales. Such reliance on the internet would create a single point of failure for calculating child support throughout the state, this making a downloadable option a necessity.

Philip Ladin stated that at the last commission meeting a topic of a statewide portal for the Department of Corrections was approached, and it would make sense for the State to collaborate on a higher level regarding internet connectivity and infrastructure to avoid duplicative costs from department to department. It remains unclear on how to achieve this at the moment.

A consensus among the present Committee members has been reached to develop and roll out simultaneously a web-based and downloadable calculator while moving away from Excel as swiftly as is reasonable.

Wendy Williamson made a motion to plan a future for the hybrid and to move away from Excel. Philip Ladin seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Deborah Johnson inquired upon the timeframe for the development of the new calculator and the expiration of the current Excel calculator. Philip Ladin speculated that the hybrid version could be ready by the first of next year and Elaine Johnson expects the current calculator to work with the supported Excel versions and Microsoft operating systems for that time frame.

Pat Buonodono stated that if the cost of the new calculator exceeds the money on hand then the Commission would have to ask the legislature for funds which could prove difficult.

Wendy Williamson expressed items she feels should be achieved: a timeline developed for implementation and awareness and education raised early in the process about the changes to come. Pat Buonodono stated the next step in the process would be to solicit bids and to draft a list of requirements for this bid. Elaine Johnson relayed her previous experience with Accenture that the requirements be worded in such a way that they detail all needs but also that some room is left for interpretation.

Judge Weaver made a motion to begin the process of drafting requirements for a hybrid calculator. Wendy Williamson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Wendy Williamson stated that both options have their costs and Philip Ladin added that risks are inherent in both options as well. The committee now has an action item of producing a cost-benefit analysis for the next Commission meeting. Wendy Williamson pointed out that money spent propping up the Excel calculator could possibly have less benefit than money spent to

drive towards a web-based and hybrid calculator due to the underlying benefits such as an increase in technological infrastructure that would likely occur.

IV. New Business

No new business was brought forth that was not already introduced in the prior discussion.

V. Close of meeting and scheduling of next meeting

The Next Technology and Calculator Committee meeting is scheduled for May 2, 2014 at 12 pm at the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The meeting adjourned at 1:18 pm.