

# GEORGIA CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES COMMISSION

## Summary of Meeting Minutes

June 1, 2005

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 am, with the Commission Members being sworn in by Harold D. Melton, Executive Counsel, Office of the Governor. The Members in attendance were as follows: Representative Earl Ehrhart; Judge A. Quillian Baldwin, Jr; Judge Louisa Abbot; Judge Thomas Campbell; Judge Debra Bernes; Senator Seth Harp; Senator Joseph Carter; Sadie Fields; Annetta Panatera; Judge R. Michael Key; Charles Clay; Dr. John Clayton Thomas; Dr. Roger Tutterow. The members not in attendance were as follows: Joy Hawkins and Representative Stanley Watson. This meeting was open to the public.

Following the swearing in ceremony, Representative Ehrhart (“Chairman Ehrhart”), serving as chair of the Commission asked that all members present introduce themselves. Chairman Ehrhart also introduced the staff that will be working with the Commission.

### **I. Child Support Guideline Commission’s Overview**

Chairman Ehrhart announced that the purpose of this Commission is two-fold: (1) continue the responsibility of past Guidelines Commissions to have the Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”) certify the economic viability and appropriateness of the state’s child support guidelines, and (2) to follow the responsibilities and duties as set forth in HB 221, which will change the method and manner in how child support will be calculated. Regarding the first purpose of the Commission, Chairman Ehrhart announced that Robert Riddle, Director of the Georgia Office of Child Support Enforcement, wrote to the Atlanta Office of HHS Administration for Children and Families seeking a deadline extension of the State Commission’s Report, which will detail the state’s consideration of economic data concerning the costs of raising children and analysis of case data on the application of and deviations from the guidelines. The report’s initial due date is June 30, 2005, with the request being made to extend the deadline to June 30, 2006.

#### **A. Commission’s Authorities and Powers**

Chairman Ehrhart read to the members the various authorities and powers of the Commission, as outlined in the newly enacted House Bill 221.

#### **B. Duties of the Commission**

Chairman Ehrhart discussed the various duties of the Commission, as outlined in the members’ agendas and found in HB 221. He encouraged direct participation by the members, thus, suggested that if there was interest, that the Commission members

participate in subcommittees that would meet separately and report back to the full Commission on their respective topics. Chairman Ehrhart proposed the following subcommittees: (1) Economic Study and Obligation Tables Subcommittee (2) Statute Review Subcommittee (3) Case Scenario Subcommittee (4) Forms Subcommittee and (5) Training Subcommittee. The former two subcommittees are immediately imperative to jumpstart the Commission's work, and will need to initiate immediately. Commission Members agreed to the subcommittees, and while several volunteered to serve, the suggestion was made to send an e-mail to each member seeking their preferences as to which subcommittee. Both Dr. Tutterow and Senator Harp agreed to chair the Economic Study Committee, and Judge Abbot agreed to chair the Statute Review Subcommittee.

- 1. STUDYING AND COLLECTING INFORMATION AND DATA-**  
Chairman Ehrhart led the discussion as to how other states and previous Commissions looked at national economic data regarding the costs of raising children, but this Commission has been given the task by the Georgia legislature to look at Georgia specific economic data. Thus, the Commission will be seeking to contract for a Georgia specific economic data. The Commission members agreed that the ideal would be for the state's universities to produce it. In addition, the Commission needs to look at methods or manner in how to accumulate case data as to the amount of deviations from the guidelines. Discussion ensued as to how to collect the data from final orders: whether the clerks submit the data or staff reviews each order within a month time frame.
- 2. CREATE AND REVISE THE CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATION TABLE-**  
Chairman Ehrhart announced that based on the data collected from the economic study, the Commission will develop Child Support Obligation Tables. The Commission will have to ensure that various components, either included in the statute or discussed within the Legislative Committees are incorporated into the tables.
- 3. TO STUDY AND EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF GEORGIA'S SUPPORT GUIDELINES-**  
Chairman Ehrhart announced that the efficiency of the Guidelines will be tested using various case scenarios derived from case data compilations. The scenarios will be indicative of all economic situations and geographic locations around the state. At this juncture, it will be important to consider the public's input on the proposed guidelines as it applies to real kids and real families in order to make the best model for the state of Georgia. Public hearings will be held in at least four various locations around the state, such as Chatham County, Middle or West Georgia, Atlanta and Albany.

**4. TO EVALUATE AND CONSIDER THE EXPERIENCES AND RESULTS IN OTHER STATES WHICH UTILIZE CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES-**

Though the Commission will use Georgia specific data, Chairman Ehrhart stated that other states, such as Maryland, may provide a model for how a state conducts its own economic studies. Chairman Ehrhart said the Commission will review the experiences encountered by other states and how it has affected their state's families. One specific area of study will be to review what other states have done regarding accumulation of economic data, whether it is done by the state's local universities or utilization of national data.

**5. REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE-**

Pursuant to the statute, Chairman Ehrhart discussed that the work done by the Commission does not automatically authorize or require a change in the child support obligation table, without approval and action by the General Assembly. Chairman Ehrhart said that it should be the Commission's goal that the General Assembly will use their authority to respect and implement the Commission's suggested recommendations.

**6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINES-**

Chairman Ehrhart announced that the Commission will develop and publish worksheets and an electronic calculator associated with the use of the child support obligation tables. Chairman Ehrhart said that the development of software to produce a calculator may require consulting and contracting with outside firms. In addition, Commission Members discussed the Commission's responsibility in developing training manuals and information to educate judges, attorneys, and litigants on the use of the table and guidelines, and to collaborate with the Institute for Continuing Judicial Education, the Institute of Continuing Legal Education, and other agencies for the purpose of training persons who will be utilizing the child support table and child support guidelines.

**7. ONGOING COMMISSION-**

In addition to the reviews the federal regulations require, the Georgia statute created a Commission which will have an ongoing duty to continually review the Guidelines. Chairman Ehrhart and members of the Commission shared the sentiment that past Commissions have often complained that there was never enough time to conduct the samplings and studies needed. As part of quality assurance, the Commission will conduct a review every two years to determine if the child support obligation results in appropriate presumptive awards. In addition, it will identify and make recommendations for modification to the Child Support Obligation Table or the Child Support Guidelines, and lastly, create and ensure maintenance of data bases.

**C. Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

Representative Ehrhart suggested that the subcommittees will likely meet once a month in addition to the full Commission monthly meetings, which members agreed will be held on Fridays.

At the next meeting, Judge Abbot will make a presentation, similar to what was given to the recent Family Law Institute, regarding the various provisions in the new statute. Further, the Economic Study and Obligations Table Subcommittee will make a report, and possibly require a full commission vote on the development of the economic study.

Upon a short break, Senator Harp ascertained that he had contacted the University System and the Chancellor pledged his support for Georgia's universities to participate in the economic study immediately.

**D. Future Meeting Date**

The next meeting was set for Friday, July 8, 2005 at 10:00am.

The meeting was adjourned.