

GEORGIA CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES COMMISSION

Summary of Meeting Minutes

July 8, 2005

Representative Earl Ehrhart, Chairman of the Commission, called the Commission Meeting to order at 10:00 am. Commission Members reintroduced themselves, and 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; Joy Hawkins; Sadie Fields; Annetta Panatera; Judge R. Michael Key; Representative Stanley Watson; Dr. John Clayton Thomas; and Dr. Roger Tutterow. Members Chuck Clay and State Senator Joseph Carter were unable to attend. Representative Ehrhart [hereinafter "Chairman Ehrhart"] introduced the Commission staff. This meeting was open to the public.

After the Commission Members had the opportunity to review the June 1, 2005 Commission Meeting minutes, a motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes. The Member unanimously approved the meeting minutes from the June 1, 2005 meeting. In addition, Chairman Ehrhart announced that the Department of Health and Human Services has granted Georgia an extension from June 30, 2005 until July 1, 2006 to submit a report regarding the appropriateness of the state's Child Support Guidelines. This additional time would allow the Guidelines Commission to gather case data from the clerks of court and complete a review and analyses of information before a report can be compiled. Moreover, this extension was granted in light of the fact that Georgia is in the midst of revising its guideline calculation and conducting an economic study.

I. Statute Review Subcommittee Report and Statute Overview Presentation

Judge Louisa Abbot, Superior Court Judge, gave a report on the work of the Statute Review Subcommittee, which she chairs. The Statute Review Subcommittee had met on June 23, 2005. The subcommittee, on that date, had reached a consensus on the purpose of the Statute Review Subcommittee, heard from a couple of private family law attorneys on the background of House Bill 221, and addressed mostly technical issues found in the statute.

Additionally, Judge Abbot provided this Commission Meeting with an overview of the statute, going through each section of the statute. The primary focus of her presentation was reviewing the revisions to the current O.C.G.A. §19-6-15. Judge Abbot reviewed the new definition section and the specific sections on adjusted gross income, calculation of presumptive award, work related child care expenses, pro rata obligations, grounds for deviation, parenting time adjustments, involuntary loss of income and modifications.

II. Economic Study and Obligation Table Subcommittee Report

Dr. Roger Tutterow, the new Dean of the School of Business, Mercer University and Chair of the Economic Study and Obligation Tables Subcommittee, announced that he was in

the midst of assembling a team of approximately ten state economists to work on a Georgia specific economic study on the costs of raising children. By next week's subcommittee meeting, the Commission should have firm commitments by the majority of these economists. It is also possible that several nationally known economists may be contracted to work with the Georgia economists. The first Economic Study and Obligation Table Subcommittee Meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 13, 2005.

III. Forms Subcommittee and Development of an Electronic Calculator

Cindy Moss, State Operations Manager, Georgia Office of Child Support Enforcement, provided a presentation as to how the state office of Child Support Enforcement could produce an electronic calculator to aid in calculating child support under House Bill 221. The state's version could be available through the Child Support Enforcement constituent portal and a stand alone version. The goal is to also make the calculator user friendly, especially to the potential litigants. One way to do so is to have the calculator "question-driven." Once the individual answers a question, the person would be directed to the next screen dependent on how the previous question was answered.

To ensure that this subcommittee becomes active quickly so that forms and electronic calculator are available when the process is rolled out to the public in late Fall, Chairman Ehrhart sought a subcommittee chairperson. State Senator Seth Harp agreed to serve as this subcommittee chair.

IV. Case Sampling/Case Scenario Subcommittee

This potential subcommittee derives from the fact that the state is still required to gather case data on how the current guidelines are being applied. To that end, Commission Member and Court of Appeals Judge Debra Bernes stated that if the state can gather data now (even though the current guideline model will soon change), it will provide a basis of comparison with the new guidelines model. Thus, Judge Bernes is willing to draft and sign a letter to the Superior Court Clerks seeking all final orders related to child support for September 2005. Orders may also be obtained from the Office of Child Support Enforcement for years prior to 2005.

V. Training Subcommittee Status

While the Training Subcommittee has not become active yet, Judge Michael Key, Juvenile Court Judge, who has previously expressed interest in various training aspects, was appointed chairperson of this Committee.

VI. Future Agenda Items/Meeting Dates

Chairman Ehrhart introduced family law attorney Steve Steele, who is the current Chair of the Family Law Section of the Georgia State Bar. In doing so, Chairman Ehrhart emphasized that the Commission is looking for feedback, comments and recommendations on clarification of the statute. He said the Commission would benefit from this.

After discussion on the next meeting date in August, it was decided that Staff will send Commission members several alternative dates from which to choose. The meeting was then adjourned.