

Georgia Child Support Guidelines Commission Meeting

SUMMARY OF MEETING MINUTES

October 6, 2005

Chairman, Representative Earl Ehrhart

I. Welcome and Introductions

Representative Earl Ehrhart, Chairman of the Commission, called the Commission Meeting to order at 10:30 am. Commission Members reintroduced themselves, and members in attendance were as follows: Representative Earl Ehrhart; Judge Louisa Abbot; Judge Debra Bernes; Senator Seth Harp; Dr. Roger Tutterow; Chuck Clay; Annetta Panatera; Sadie Fields; and Judge Quillian Baldwin. Representative Ehrhart [hereinafter “Chairman Ehrhart”] asked the Commission Staff to introduce themselves, as well as members of the audience. This meeting was open to the public.

The minutes from the September 9, 2005 minutes were distributed to the Commission members. The members reviewed them, and Senator Harp moved to approve the minutes. With no further discussion and objection, approval of the minutes passed.

II. Obligation Tables

Chairman Ehrhart announced that the purpose of this meeting is to get the advice and consent of the Commission Members regarding the variables and components needed to create an obligation table, called for in HB 221. This meeting results from the presentation given by Dr. Jane Venohr of PSI almost four weeks ago. The idea is to provide PSI with direction and guidance to create the tables, and thus, have a finished product to present to the public in a series of public hearings across the state.

Chairman Ehrhart announced that one of the tasks put to the Economic Study and Obligation Table Subcommittee, chaired by Dr. Tutterow, was to work with the Economic Task Force regarding recommendations as to the data of child rearing costs which will be the basis for the obligation table. One such recommendation was whether Georgia should use national data or adjust for Georgia specific numbers. Chairman Ehrhart asked Dr. Tutterow for the findings and whether his subcommittee voted to adopt these recommendations.

Dr. Tutterow reported on these recommendations and the Economic Study and Obligation Table Subcommittee’s approval or non-approval of these recommendations regarding estimators of child rearing costs and adjustments the estimates to Georgia.

- A. Recommendation on Selecting a Methodology as to the Estimates of Child-Rearing Expenditures—The recommendation is to rely on an equally weighted average of the Rothbarth and Engel estimators.

- B. Recommendation on Adjusting Estimates for Georgia—The Economic Study Subcommittee recommended that annual adjustments be made using the Consumer Price Index to capture inflation effects. Additionally, the Economic Study Subcommittee heard from the Economic Task Force that there were not sufficient variation between Georgia and national averages in terms of consumption and spending patterns to justify going with Georgia specific adjustments to these child rearing estimates.

- C. Other Recommendations Regarding Development of Obligation Table—Also the Subcommittee recommended that we move forward with PSI developing the actual tables. However, subsequent to the consensus of the Subcommittee, the recommendation is that PSI not only provides the weighted average of Rothbarth and Engel, but individual tables using the Rothbarth and Engel estimators. (Three separate tables) This will provide the Subcommittee with the ability to compare the tables using a variety of scenarios to ensure that the Committee is comfortable with the outcome and final results in terms of realistic expenditures. Chairman Ehrhart thanked Dr. Tutterow for his efforts and said the Commission will want the capacity to evaluate all of the estimators. Chairman Ehrhart also recommended that the Consumer Price Index be used on a yearly basis to determine any fluctuations and costs in regard to raising children.

Chairman Ehrhart opened the meeting up for discussion regarding these recommendations. Judge Abbot said it may be productive to keep the Economic Task Force involved and informed in the future. We may need to research and inquire to the economists' respective universities whether there will be costs involved in keeping the economists active with this project. Dr. Tutterow said it should not be overly burdensome to keep the economists involved.

A motion was made to adopt the recommendations of the Economic Task Force, and the recommendation of an ongoing study using the Consumer Price Index. The motion was seconded, and the Commission unanimously approved the recommendations.

III. Subcommittee Reports

A. Statute Review Subcommittee—Judge Abbot reported that great progress was made at the September 9, 2005 meeting. Meeting minutes and documentation of action taken at that meeting was distributed to Commission members. Judge Abbot thanked Chairman Ehrhart for the referral to Legislative Counsel, as Jill Travis, Deputy Director of that office has been extremely helpful. The next Statute Review Subcommittee Meeting is October 12, 2005. Senator Harp complimented the work of this Subcommittee as making the statute much easier to read. Chairman Ehrhart stated that he hopes in the future other complex statutes will be given a year for review as this one has had. Judge Abbot said that one of the unintended consequences of utilizing community resources and the legal community is that many persons have had to learn the statute. This should help immensely with the training.

B. Forms Subcommittee—Chairman Ehrhart called on the Forms Subcommittee Chair, Senator Harp, for an update. Senator Harp said that a Worksheet Taskforce is in operation and is made up of members from the Family Law Section of the State Bar, American Academy of Matrimonial Attorneys and Judges. It is being facilitated by the Office of Child Support

Enforcement. Jill Radwin announced that the Taskforce was to meet again this afternoon. Senator Harp suggested that the Taskforce actually develop two versions of each of the anticipated worksheets. One version would use the language as it exists under the present bill. The other version would exhibit the proposed language, as being developed by the Statute Review Subcommittee, and will be presented to the Legislature in January.

C. Training Subcommittee—Judge Key, who is chairing this Subcommittee, was not able to attend this meeting. Jill Radwin announced that the Training Subcommittee may meet on October 12, in conjunction with the Statute Review Subcommittee. Judge Abbot also commented that she and Jill will be speaking on October 21, 2005 to an ADR seminar, hosted by the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution. Additionally, Judge Abbot will be speaking to the Augusta Bar and American Academy of Matrimonial Attorneys. Chairman Ehrhart said he will be speaking to the Cobb Bar Association. Stephen Steele was asked from the audience regarding the Family Law Section's involvement. He answered that his organization is involved in both the Training Subcommittee and the Worksheet Taskforce. His organization is also attending the Statute Review Subcommittee Meetings.

D. Case Scenario/Sampling Subcommittee—Judge Bernes announced that there were twelve counties selected and asked to submit all final child support orders from the month of September. To date, one county has already submitted their orders; however, the counties have until October 15 to submit their orders. A Subcommittee Meeting will be held the next week to determine how to process these orders. One of the primary purposes of analyzing these orders is to determine how many orders deviated from the guidelines. Judge Bernes announced that a follow up letter was to be sent out this afternoon. Chairman Ehrhart said he was grateful that we will finally have the case data called for in the federal regulations.

IV. New Business or Comments from Commission Members

Senator Harp recommended that the Commission make a recommendation to the Governor to honor the Economists who worked on the Study Group. This may be in the form of a letter of commendation.

Chairman Ehrhart said the Commission needs to start planning the public hearings. Consensus was made to try to cover the four corners of the state in a week's time in early December. Judge Abbot suggested that we need to cover the state once we get the Obligation Tables back. Chairman Ehrhart said for Staff to start looking at sites. Senator Harp suggested that ICLE assist us and use video conferencing to bring in more persons. He also asked Jill to contact Nancy Hall of GPTV to assist in perhaps broadcasting a program to all of the state public television stations. Chairman Ehrhart said the goal is to get the input from as many as possible.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.