

Minutes of Meeting
Georgia Child Support Commission
Calculator/Technology Committee
November 22, 2013

The meeting began at 10:00 a.m.

Present:

Philip Ladin, Co-Chairman,

Judge Warren Davis

Representative Timothy Barr

Ryan Bradley, Policy Unit at DCSS

Megan Miller, Atlanta Legal Aid, Fulton County (Guest)

Patricia Buonodono, Staff Attorney

Elaine Johnson, Staff

Bruce Shaw, Staff

Present via telephone:

Deborah Johnson, Attorney, Atlanta Legal Aid, Dekalb County

Laurie Dyke, Esq.

- I. Welcome and Introductions

- II. Review/Approval of Minutes of Last Meeting

Philip Ladin inquired if everyone had an opportunity to review the minutes, no objections were raised. Representative Barr moved to approve the minutes, Ryan Bradley seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

- III. Old Business
 - A. "Power User" Survey
 1. Review of Survey Results

Patricia Buonodono went over the results of the survey that was disseminated to "power users" of the child support calculator (the "calculator"); these users include Legal Aid attorneys, mediators and Department of Child Support Service (DCSS) agents. This survey demonstrated that a significant amount of users have internet accessibility issues both in courthouses and in their offices. Most of the results indicate a strong need for a standalone calculator; however, the

users desire to access worksheets from any computer, a feature a web-based calculator could best provide.

2. Discussion

Representative Barr stated he believes a move can be made to a program that is created and supported for the State rather than run into support and update issues from software companies such as Microsoft and Google. He inquired of the Committee if there was any foreseeable reason to not pursue a program that is both web-based and downloadable, to which none was given. Philip Ladin added that while Google does have spreadsheet applications, they are all web-based, emphasizing the need to move away from something such as Google.

Philip Ladin then spoke of the concerns of Judge Davis, who sent out an email to the Committee which led to this survey, that internet access is uneven across the State with rural areas often times having the most access issues. Judge Davis confirmed that even in the Gwinnett County courthouse the wireless internet is intermittent and unreliable. According to Judge Davis the problem with wireless internet in his courthouse, and likely others, is that the structure is built with steel girders that inhibit wireless ability. Judge Davis stated that he has also spoken with DCSS agents who have informed him that internet access is intermittent in their offices as well. Judge Davis asserted that while having a web-based calculator in progress was a good idea, the current infrastructure is inadequate for it to be reliable.

An important point emphasized by Judge Davis is that Georgia is more than just a child support calculator state, it is a child support worksheet state as well. According to O.C.G.A. § 19-6-15(m), a court order or judgment cannot be entered without a completed worksheet attached. Even though Judge Davis believes in the long run that a web-based version will be the way to go given the quantum leaps in developing technology, it is important not to take actions that would impede the completion and submittal of worksheets in the short term. Representative Barr ensured Judge Davis that he is not advocating a web-based program but a program that is downloadable that also works in tandem with a web-based application. Representative Barr researched and has been in contact with several companies to see if this would be feasible on the limited budget available for the calculator, and he has received positive feedback.

Laurie Dyke added that as a practitioner, she brings her own wireless hotspot and her own printer to various courthouses and still has difficulties accessing the internet (this occurred as recently as last week). She believed it to be impractical to move to a solely web-based application but she does like the idea of one that is downloadable and web-based. She added that it should be possible to build a stand-alone application because the current calculator doesn't use any of the advanced functions of a program like Excel.

Philip Ladin expressed an interest in speaking with Representative Barr after to the meeting to obtain company contact information to research building a calculator with the hopes of reporting on the topic at the next meeting.

Patricia Buonodono stated another possibility of rebuilding the calculator in Excel 2013, which should allow for a significant amount of time for the development and implementation of a web-

based application for people to grow accustomed to. Judge Davis stressed the importance of transferability of files created on a web-based calculator if this were to be the path taken.

An inquiry was made of the previous problems with the first web-based calculator's vendor by Judge Davis, to which Philip Ladin responded that the calculator was designed incorrectly from the beginning but defects didn't become apparent until later on. Once it was realized the calculator wasn't working as needed, the only way to fix it was to redesign it. The vendor refused to rebuild without a fee, citing that the design had already been approved, leaving no way for it to be redesigned within the available budget.

Philip Ladin moved the discussion to what he believed would be the best direction for the new calculator. He suggested the new calculator could possibly be of a dual kind, where it is a downloadable program that is also capable of transmitting data back to a web-based application to be stored on an accessible database. Laurie Dyke had a question regarding this proposal: How would data uploads work with multiple versions of a worksheet? Often attorneys create multiple versions of the same worksheet to evaluate different scenarios, which aids in settlement discussions and analysis. Philip Ladin advised that this question will be considered in the next level of discussion, once the Committee has decided upon a web-based, standalone or dual calculator. Deborah Johnson added that given the current discussion, she has concerns of the thought process for development. To her, given the most recent survey results, the thought process should be to develop a standalone program and to then adapt a web-based program from the standalone program so as not to lose focus on the type of calculator that currently works regardless of infrastructure constraints. Deborah Johnson reiterated concerns she addressed at the previous meeting of starting with another state's calculator that is built to track their guidelines rather than building a calculator that tracks Georgia's guidelines.

B. Where do we go from here?

This agenda item was largely covered in the survey results discussion. A time deadline was discussed and it is generally expected that two years is the soft deadline due to Microsoft updates. Elaine Johnson explained that if a new calculator is built in Excel 2013 it will only be backwards compatible to Excel 2007, but we don't know at what point support for backwards compatibility can be maintained for Excel 2007 due to the increased frequency of Microsoft software releases. Philip Ladin added that in his experiences at courthouses, the version of Excel that is being run on the machines available to attorneys and the public are running Excel 2003. He suggested putting courthouses and other organizations, such as Family Law Information Centers, on notice that they may have future calculator issues if they continue to run older versions of Excel. Deborah Johnson commented that they should also be aware of problems that occur while using the newest version of Excel.

For information purposes Elaine Johnson inquired of Ryan Bradley as to what version of Excel is being used by DCSS, to which he replied they are currently using 2007 but are in the process of upgrading to 2010.

IV. New Business

A. Proof of Concept

Philip Ladin put together a proof of concept located at www.childsupport.ladinlaw.com. On the first page of the proof of concept there are two links other than the login link: One link is to a quick entry version of a calculator where most of the important fields can be entered on a single page; the other is a full version that follows the current Excel Data Entry Form exactly. The proof of concept calculator has been tested and runs on a wide variety of operating systems without any issues. The proof of concept demonstrates how a web based calculator can be designed in a user friendly way, where users of the current Excel calculator would already be familiar with the design and input methods. Included is a feature that allows users to print, save and modify worksheets. It is constructed in such a way that pro se litigants can only view worksheets they create, attorneys can view all worksheets for any of their clients and judges can view all worksheets created for their county. Laurie Dyke raised concerns that power users wanted to keep multiple versions of a worksheet that are strictly for private use as well as concerns about needing quick access to particular schedules absent of time consuming command prompts of a website. Philip Ladin responded that the proof of concept was only for demonstration purposes and that private worksheets and accessibility to schedules could be addressed in the actual development of the website. Philip Ladin stated that time needed to be spent with power users such as Laurie Dyke to document a list of requirements during the development period.

B. Other new business

Judge Davis expressed an interest in developing an instructional video for the Child Support Worksheets. Patricia Buonodono informed the Committee that the staff of the Georgia Commission on Child Support is currently working on an instructional video to be posted on Youtube as well as a video recording on of a training to be posted on the Commission's website.

V. Close of meeting and scheduling of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday, January 10, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. at the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.