

Georgia Commission on Child Support
February 18, 2014
Meeting Minutes

Present were:

Commissioners:

Judge Louisa Abbot, Chair
Wendy Williamson, Esq.
Chuck Clay, Esq.
Judge Michael Key
Katie Connell, Esq.
Dr. Roger Tutterow
Judge Lisa C. Rambo

Pat Buonodono, Esq., Staff Attorney
Elaine Johnson, Staff
Bruce Shaw, Staff

Guests:

Philip Ladin, Co-Chair of the Calculator/Technology Committee
Ryan Bradley, Policy Unit, DCSS
Megan Miller, Staff Attorney, Atlanta Legal Aid Society
Alice Limehouse, Esq.

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m.

I. Welcome and Introductions

II. Review/Approval of Minutes of 11/22/2013 Meeting

As no quorum was present, the vote to approve the minutes of the 11/22/2013 meeting was tabled until the next Commission meeting.

III. Old Business

A. Committee Reports

1. Statute Review Committee

a. Pending Legislation

Patricia Buonodono reported that House Bill 701 was passed through by the House Judiciary Committee on February 17, 2014. The bill that passed was a substituted bill, one change was made to remove the word “solely” from line 290 of the bill as it was originally introduced. The bill now reads in lines 289 through 291:

In child support services cases in which neither parent prepared a worksheet, the court may rely ~~solely~~ on the worksheet prepared by child support services as a basis for its order.

The removal of the word “solely” prevents an interpretation of the code that would disallow courts from considering anything other than the worksheet provided.

The bill will now be brought before the House Rules Committee by Representative Barr and must be passed there before it can cross over to the Senate.

At the time of this meeting, there has been no action on Senate Bill 282. There was a subcommittee scheduled for this bill but it was cancelled and nothing has yet been scheduled.

2. Technology/Calculator Committee

Philip Ladin reported that the Technology and Calculator Committee had previously viewed a proof of concept for a web based calculator. This proof of concept was successful as far as functioning like the Excel child support calculator, however upon further research into web connectivity, communications and internet access is a persistent issue in many of Georgia’s courtrooms as well as others in the child support field. The focus of the Committee has now shifted from exploring a solely web-based calculator to exploring the possibility of a hybrid application that performs offline as well as online.

Philip Ladin has had conversations with many vendors across the state and a common problem is that vendors claiming to have a web-based solution will only offer a PDF file with fillable fields as an offline solution. Given how inefficient a PDF would be for Judges, court personnel, attorneys and litigants, this solution is unacceptable. The next step for the Committee is to develop a write up that delineates the process to achieve a hybrid solution, how it would work, and how it would help the state succeed with the child support calculator now and in the future.

The meeting was opened for questions and Alice Limehouse inquired about what security measures would there be to protect personal identifier data to which Philip responded data would likely need to be stored on a stand-alone database; the details have not been outlined yet but they will certainly be addressed in any write up of requirements.

Judge Abbot inquired if an exploration had been made for statewide access to Excel. Philip Ladin responded that he had reached out to Microsoft but they had never responded and that he would reach out to them again. From his previous experiences with DHR’s attempt to acquire a statewide site license, the cost was huge which made it unfeasible.

Judge Abbot commented that the Department of Corrections is creating a statewide portal for the entry of all sentences, and Philip Ladin asked if anyone has looked at the cost to the state to

ensure internet access in all of the courthouses. If statewide e-filing systems such as the Department of Corrections portal presently require internet access, there should also be a unified plan for internet access that is utilized for more than just child support. Pat Buonodono stated that she would look into the matter through the Administrative Office of the Courts and see if it has ever been approached. Wendy Williamson asked for clarification whether the discussion of the lack of internet access pertained mostly to the public or if some court houses had no internet at all, to which the Commission members clarified the discussion was of the public's access to the internet.

Judge Abbot asked for a demonstration of a proof of concept for the next generation of Georgia's child support calculator. Philip Ladin agreed to do such a demonstration at the next Commission meeting. Philip also stressed that number one priority is the telecommunications issue because if it was solved a transition could be made directly to a web-based calculator and eliminate any steps in between.

3. Economic Study Committee

a. Letters from Judge Branch to County Clerks

Pat Buonodono took this opportunity to thank Judge Branch for signing the letters to the 12 clerks of the counties selected for the case sampling although she was unable to attend this Commission meeting.

b. Level of response from Clerks

Pat Buonodono reported that the response from Clerks has been great and that so far 75 percent of the Clerks have sent in their orders and 100 percent are expected to have their orders in before the end of February. DCSS has responded with their orders as well.

Dr. Tutterow stated that at the last meeting there was an action item to retain an economic expert to assist in establishing the child support awards tables. At that time an interest was indicated in surveying around for the options available in terms of professional guidance, Dr. Tutterow stated that after having made some calls to some other states it does appear in his opinion that Dr. Jane Venohr is highly competent, competitively priced and with an intimate knowledge of the work at hand.

Dr. Tutterow stated it was his personal preference to retain Dr. Venohr for this study but raised the question as to if it could be voted on at this meeting being that the Commission was one shy of a quorum. Judge Abbot stated that there was nothing prohibiting the Commission from voting by email and stated that it was also her opinion that retaining Dr. Venohr is in the best interest of the state.

Judge Key suggested that the committee take a straw vote at the meeting of the members present who have had the opportunity to listen to the presentations and discussion to give some direction to those who did not have the same opportunity.

Dr. Tutterow made a motion to retain Dr. Venohr as the Commission's expert to review the basic child support obligation tables. Judge Key seconded the motion. All Commission members present for this meeting voted in favor of this motion. Subsequent to the February 18, 2014 Commission meeting, Pat Buonodono polled the members of the Commission via email and received 10 votes to approve the motion. The motion carried unopposed.

B. Other Old Business

Judge Abbot encouraged Commission members to seek out new persons to participate in some of the committees. Judge Abbot recommended the likes of Representative Regina Quick, who is astute, a state representative and a family lawyer, for a committee like Judge Key's Statute Review Committee.

IV. New Business

Pat Buonodono stated that the staff of the Commission has been working on video tutorials, which are geared toward self-represented litigants, to be posted on the Commission's website that instruct users how to prepare a child support worksheet. The videos will first be piloted in conjunction with a select Family Law Information Center and then made available to the public. Judge Abbot suggested the commission staff to also ask the State Bar to include the videos on their website as well and to try to have them posted on as many resources as possible.

Judge Abbot brought forth that the Commission is supposed to meet once a month but proposed that she be allowed to schedule meetings as needed to avoid members from traveling monthly to what would then be shorter meetings.

V. Close of Meeting and Scheduling Next Meeting

The next meeting being scheduled is contingent upon one of two things: the Technology and Calculator Committee's presentation and the readiness thereof or the first meeting of the Statute Review Committee being held.

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 a.m.