Minutes of Meeting
Georgia Child Support Commission
Calculator/Technology Committee
August 2, 2013

The meeting began at 11:15 a.m.

Present:
Wendy Williamson, Chair
Representative Timothy Barr
Phil Ladin (and wife, Debbie Ladin)
Elaine Johnson
Pat Buonodono
Dorothy Thomas – CP who has an issue with DCSS calculation of self-employment income (decided to give Elaine information and leave).
Wayne Drummond, Georgia Professional Human Services Association
Senator Emanuel Jones

I.   **Welcome and Introductions**

Elaine went over general housekeeping issues such as location of restrooms.

II.   **Review of Worksheet and Child Support Guidelines Statute**

Elaine gave a quick overview of child support worksheets. Statute introduced HB 221 in 2005, didn't include table; required study. SB 382 in 2006, passed effective January 1, 2007, included table.

Initially, the Commission rewrote and organized statute. Organized forms committee, which is the foundation of where this group came from. Phil Ladin became project manager over building calculators. There were many iterations of the calculator before it was finalized.

Elaine showed the Commission website, where to get the child support statute, and download the Excel calculators. We always have a message when we last updated.

The link for the calculators takes the user to another page. We have information for Mac users on this page. There are four versions of the child support calculator. Two are paper forms. Full paper form and EZ form, which Pat explained is for use in DV cases.

There is a separate user guide for each calculator.

Elaine opened the regular calculator, discussed enabling the macros. Calculator cannot read the table without it. Can only enter information in fields that are yellow. Handout of 19-6-15(b), shows how worksheet images the statute.

Rep. Barr asked to explain what the issues are with the calculator as we go through it. Discussion of whether worksheet is the issue here or Excel and its many iterations is the issue.

Phil:
3 key areas –
1. Cost and labor required to ensure it works over all versions and on Mac and Windows.
2. 99% of population doesn't understand what these fields mean.
3. Issues with portability to other devices.

Another issue – form can accommodate 12 children, but table only goes up to 6 children. Amount of BCSO (basic child support obligation) won't change. Apparently this is causing a problem in some DCSS cases. But it was also noted that in these situations, there is usually very little income to go around.

We also have courthouses without public access to the internet. And there are some judges who won't take the "pen and paper" forms.

Rep. Barr – we have four forms, if we do one, are we finished? Explained how it works.

Phil Ladin – BCSO, if people do manual form, they have to find income (after adjustments) on BCSO. This Excel worksheet "automagically" calculates everything as you enter the data. Table is the last tab; goes from $800 – $30,000/month.

Have to hit each tab to print that page. Wastes paper. If we have a web page, it could consolidate it down to a page or two. Court clerks would love this.

Senator Jones asked, and it was affirmed, that we are all in agreement that we need to move to another format.

The Data Entry Form is geared for pro se litigants. When statute changed in 2009, we had to change worksheets so at that time developed this data entry form. There were no funds to repair the web based calculator that did live once upon a time. DCSS could not continue to support it.

Web based calculator was not popular with Judges; they wanted the forms printed and brought to court.

Existing calculator was exhibited to the Committee so they can see how it works. It does all calculations, takes into consideration previous child support orders. Our worksheet is all inclusive; it will run calculation from wherever you put number into worksheet.

We have been looking at other states, and there are some states that require you to do a calculation.

Discussion of how the worksheet does calculations, used work related child care as an example. Explained deviations, that they are discretionary with the judge.

Any new product has to be intuitive, judge friendly, user friendly, attorney friendly.

III.   Committee's Mission, Composition and Timeline

A.   Mission

Explore the potential for designing a new web-based calculator, which is accessible both to public and the courts.

B.   Composition of Committee

We have about 100 people on list serv. Deborah Johnson, Atlanta Legal Aid, was on original forms committee. Also Laurie Dyke, forensic accountant. Both wish to serve. We have asked DCSS to send someone with IT knowledge to serve.

Motion by Senator Jones to add Deborah Johnson, Laurie Dyke, and an IT person from DCSS to Committee; seconded by Rep. Barr.

Phil recommends someone in legal who understands how to contact or contract with other states, i.e., Kentucky. Mr. Godwin Akhirome, was with DHR but transferred to Behavioral Health. Good person to speak with to help negotiate contracts with other states. We likely have someone at AOC to help in this area. Perhaps this person can serve as an advisor to the Committee rather than being a member.

Wendy asked if our current website could host the calculator; that depends on bandwidth and server capacity. Phil discussed that storing this kind of information must comply with HIPAA and etc. Have to insure firewalls, etc. comply with state/federal regulations. Wendy proposed that we could let a class at GA Tech develop calculator as a class project. Senator Jones said they are uninsured, so probably no.

Venkat is the person in charge of DHS OIT. Someone from his office will attend Commission meetings. He used to report to the Commissioner.

Sen. Jones asked if we would be able to get what Kentucky is using since we are all federally funded. Phil mentioned that if a program is paid for with a federal grant, it should be sharable between the states. If we want to get something like that from another state, then we probably want whoever builds

it to maintain it and to modify it to serve our state's needs. Per Phil, under Georgia law the way the RFP process works, unless there is no other vendor who has exactly what you need, you can't contract with a single vendor. We will need to look into that, but first we need to see if we can get what another state is using, can we get it for free.

Commission formed this Committee to move ahead with looking at a new child support calculator for Georgia. We need to discuss how we need to move it forward. Our legislative members believe the Commission asked us to move forward by forming the Committee, so we don't need to present the initial issue of whether or not we need a calculator.

Motion by Senator Jones as amended: Deborah Johnson, Laurie Dyke, someone from DCSS IT, and a legal advisor from DHS or DCSS be added to this Committee. Second from Rep. Barr. Voted and approved.

C. Timeline

Pat stated she believed that after guidelines study would be a good time to switch to a new calculator, which would be 2015. Any revisions to statute would have to be considered in the calculator's formulations as well.

Rep. Barr feels we don't necessarily have to wait for new legislation; adjustments to the new platform going forward should be simpler than what we've been using. Phil Laden added that one of the big issues as to the timeline is looking not only at legislation, but at technology. It's not just when MS comes out with new software; whatever we get has to be compatible backward as well as forward.

IV. Funding Resources

Biggest cost to date is updating for new versions of Excel. DCSS hosted first web based child support calculator. Only problem was when server went down. Stability of server will be important.

If we change technology footprint that we're on now, when legislative changes occur, we should be able to handle that much more effectively. The $55,000 annually would go mostly away. Cost should be lower than that.

Wendy asked about bureaucratic structure of how this Committee works. Pat explained that we make recommendations to the Commission; they have to approve everything we hope to do. So if we want to put out an RFP, they will have to approve that. If we accept one, they will have to approve that. The contract would be between the Administrative Office of the Courts.

In 2005, DCSS paid for original web based calculator, made it available for public access through their portal. Accenture (now out of business) built the calculator. – old RFP still there, amount was marked out. Original RFP cost was X, production cost was exponentially higher – spent more than $1m on it.

Pat reported that the Administrative Office of the Courts/Child Support Collaborative has funds available to put toward development of a new calculator. These funds are from a block grant that the AOC received in or around 2004. There should be enough money in this fund to pay for the calculator.

   V.   **Calculator Examples from Other States**

Elaine and Pat looked at sites from around the US and provided a list to the members. Elaine printed worksheets from several other states.

Kentucky has access "access to justice" software to make things available to pro se litigants.
So these worksheets have fewer pages:
Arizona – 2
CA – 4
KY – 1
NH – 1

Phil has been looking at some other states, and how they handle the 80/20 rule – what 80% of population needs can be done in 2-3 simple pages, and with some tweaking we can make that higher. So we can look at what other states are doing. If another state used federal funds, that state can give us the program. He did some sample calculations.

Phil noted that although KY's worksheet is only one page, it is also very limited in what is shows and doesn't list any case specific information. Many are just estimators and are not something you're just taking to a courtroom. "This is an estimator only, court may make changes." Even here in GA, judges have discretion to allow deviations for things like parenting time.

We need to be able to continue to print out sheets to take the judge in court. Generally, Georgia worksheets are 9 pages. Discussion of how many judges will prepare worksheet. Varies around the state and even within each jurisdiction.

Elaine showed us Kentucky, one child – looked at comparison sheet – Sen. Jones asked about whether states we are looking at have same type of statute – we refer to this as "income shares" model. Yes, they do.

Discussion of Kentucky's sheet: would like better wording. Wendy likes that is specifies payment by pay period. Format is simple; Georgia's previous calculator took an hour to complete. Has three pages, plus a summary page that gives a total. It does need some clarification and work.

We looked to see what company created it, but KY owns and has it copyrighted.

Sen. Jones asked if our worksheet would have same result as this worksheet with same input, and it's different. Higher in GA, but explained our BCSO and how they are derived. Based on standard and cost of living in each jurisdiction.

VI.   Strategies for Seeking Judge and Attorney Input and Buy-in

How can we get surveys out? Family Law Section of State Bar will send them out on our behalf. Wendy, Phil and Pat are members. We have invited them to participate in the Commission meetings as well. Wendy had an example of the survey we used at our last training. Add some demographic information? Ask number of years in practice, and type of area – rural, urban?

Neither attorneys nor judges like change. But lawyers do like technology. They want to be able to use their iPads. If you tell them we can make it work on their iPad. Information saved on the "iCloud" can be accessed, but then full internet access is required all the time because the calculator worksheets are too big to store on the device. The Microsoft Surface is the only table compatible with the worksheets.

Family law section – engage for survey. Pat will make that contact.

VII.   Discussion on Calculator Presentation for Commission Meeting

Pat has been asked, and will show the full Commission (in 7.5 minutes or less) how our calculator works at the next meeting.

Homework: everyone look at other calculators that are similar to KY, Phil will send us an email with that information.

Sen. Jones asked someone to speak with someone from KY to see who did their calculator and if they will share. Even if they didn't use federal funds to put it together, shouldn't they have to share it with us? We will designate someone to engage Kentucky in conversation. Phil and Wendy will take that on.

We recapped the reasons we hope to move to a new calculator: 1) Cost of maintenance of present calculator; 2) complicated for lay people (should be simple and accessible); 3) lacks portability.

A separate but important issue: dealing with courthouses that have no internet (this will be a problem with a web-based calculator as well). Many people use internet through libraries, etc. Phil: another division partnered with organizations with whom the state has existing relationships, like food banks, where people can use the computer and get internet access. Wendy teaches a family law workshop,

and they are all very low income, and they all have smart phones. They can access the internet, but there is a literacy issue. You can access the computer, but you can't read or write a lot. Public housing authority has a computer available at all sites.   Could courthouses be required to make internet accessible to the public?   They would have a way to monitor, protect privacy.   It would require a legislative change to require access.   There should be a portal where they can access just the child support program. Some counties will help you create a child support worksheet through their domestic violence advocacy organization.   DeKalb, Hall, Cobb, Fulton all have family law information centers. Some counties, like Gwinnett and Clayton, have information available but not a formal FLIC.

VIII.   Close of Meeting and Scheduling Next Meeting

Wendy will miss the next Commission meeting on September 27, 2013, but is hoping to attend by phone.

Next meeting: Via conference call 9/11 at 10:30 a.m., duration 1 hour.

The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.