



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
LITCHFIELD DISTRICT PROBATE COURT

DIANE S. BLICK
JUDGE

TO: Senate Co-Chair Andrew McDonald
House Co-Chair Michael Lawlor
Senate Ranking Member John Kissel
House Ranking Member Arthur O'Neill
Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee

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FROM: Judge Diane S. Blick
Litchfield District Probate Court
Serving the Towns of Kent, Litchfield, Morris and Warren

RE: RB 1272 An Act Concerning Administration of the Courts of Probate and the Duties of the Probate Court Administrator

DATE: March 30, 2007

As a recently elected Judge of Probate, I may be new to the Judgeship, but I am not new to the system or the work and services performed by the Probate Court.

As a Probate Paralegal for over 30 years, a former Clerk of the Probate Court and now, as a Judge, I bring a unique perspective. It is extremely important to a community to have a Judge and Court that are accessible when needed. The growing needs of the more senior members of our community as well as the ever growing needs of our children make it vital to have a Court be easily accessible even on a moments notice. Our Court also welcomed the Town of Kent into our District several months ago so I also bring the experience of accomplishing a smooth transition of consolidation.

Having worked with the probate system in several capacities I am able to look at the issues from different perspectives. I highly respect the Probate Court System and though it has some difficult issues to deal with, it is a valuable asset to the residents of the community it serves and the state. I appreciate the Legislatures recommendations to fix problems facing the Court. One should never loose sight of all of the good the Court does.

1. Under minimum standards set by the General Assembly, each Court is to be open a minimum of 20 hours per week. Any court not doing so should be mandated to consolidate into a Court that is. The sooner this is achieved the better. The longer this waits, the more of a drain the smaller Courts are on the system.
2. Any town not able to meet the minimum standards to provide proper facilities should be consolidated into a Court that can. While it is nice for each town to house its own Court, obviously, it is economically and logistically not feasible. A number of Courts are served by Judges who are in the Court for only a short time or they have Clerks who work only a few hours a week. Those Courts should be consolidated into larger ones who do meet the minimum standards or go beyond the minimum standards. The regular presence of a Clerk is invaluable and allows a Judge to avoid ex parte conversation that could have a negative impact on the Judge's ultimate impartiality when hearing a case.

3. As standards have begun to be set to make Probate Courts more effective, professional and accessible, the Probate Court Administrator should be given the ability to set policy that would complement those standards and have oversight powers to see that they are met. To set a standard and not have any enforcement policy in place is not responsible. The Courts that do the job entrusted to them and follow the standards are to be commended. Those who do not, need to be brought into compliance. Failure to do so is a bad reflection on the position, the system and the community. We were elected to do a job for our communities and we should be held to the high standard of doing it right.
4. The Legislature has now required a standard of education classes for new Judges. This has been followed and the education program offered was of high caliber and most beneficial to all attending. Even established Judges who attended the seminars found the classes to be of excellent quality and the information offered to be of great substance. Having just gone through that process, I can honestly say the high quality of speakers and classes offered were a great beginning.
5. Regarding the Children's Courts and their funding, the expense of running those Courts is more cost effective than dealing with the related issues at some other, more costly level. It was eye opening to see the numbers of children's matter our Court has dealt with in the past coupled with the number of new cases that have been opened in just the short time I have been in office. Education and prevention are much less expensive than having to fund Courts...funding Children's Courts is less expensive than funding Juvenile and Superior Courts.

We recognize the system's weak links and need to replace them with stronger ones. Now is the time to make the difficult decisions that must be made and prompt action taken. Some steps were taken in the last Legislative Session. Please keep that progress going forward.

Your support of RB1272 will make this valuable system stronger so it can continue to lengthen its history of serving the public well in the future. Thank you.

Deane S. Blick