

The Connecticut General Assembly

Task Force To Study Legal Disputes Involving the Care and Custody of Minor Children

Co-Chairs:

Sue Cousineau, Esq.

Sharon Wicks Dornfeld, Esq.



c/o Judiciary Committee, Room 2500
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Email: LDCC@cga.ct.gov

DRAFT **Minutes**

Wednesday, October 2, 2013
Room 1B

Attendance: Chairperson Sue Cousineau, Esq.; Chairperson Sharon Wicks Dornfeld, Esq.; Linda Allard, Esq; Joseph J. DiTunno, Elizabeth Thayer, PhD.; Rep. Ed Vargas, Thomas Weissmuller, Esq. Absent: Rep. DebraLee Hovey, Rep. Minnie Gonzalez, Jennifer Verraneault

Welcome: Chairpersons Cousineau and Dornfeld welcomed the members and the public and set forth the protocol for the meetings. Family matters are most difficult for the courts and raise a lot of strong feelings. The task force meetings will be conducted with respect for all members and the atmosphere will be one of collegiality, openness and a forum to learn from others with differing opinions and share expert dialogue.

Introduction: Each member introduced themselves, explained their background, appointing authority and personal contribution to the task force.

Timeline & Scheduling:

- Report is due on or before February 1, 2014.
- Taskforce to be disbanded on the same date.
- Discussion included the most productive way to address the issues.
- Schedule at least two meetings a month with two meetings per objective.
- Tuesday/Thursdays best for most. Meetings to be held in morning.
- Implement Doodle to coordinate schedules.

Resources:

- Relative statutes will be sent to members in PDF format.
- Members are encouraged to suggest any additional statutes that may be relevant to the issues.
- Obtain statistics from the Judicial Branch re number of family matter cases where a GAL or AMC have been appointed.
- Sampling of GAL orders of appointment to understand GAS directives.

- Many states use the order as guideline for direction and compensation.
- Look at other states' specific orders and statutes to help define role.
- Other states handling of joint versus shared custody.
- When examining other states, cognizance of comparing apples to apples.

Public Hearing:

- Given the objectives of the task force, leave little time to hold public hearing.
- Written public comment is welcome and encouraged.
- Discussion spoke to value of personal, live testimony from affected constituents who often feel disconnected from process.
- Gun hearings were mentioned as an example of emotionally charged debate however public hearings could be held with definite guidelines for length and scope of testimony.
- Group may vote at later date to decide on public hearing option.

Foundation for Understanding:

- Attempt to get experts to explain the current culture, issues and ways to improve process to get baseline of knowledge of problems. Experts would provide:
- Evaluation of court system.
- Neutral primer on issues surrounding GAL's.
- Examine noncompliance on the willingness of each parent to facilitate relationships.
- Basis for evaluating custody arrangements.
- Information on fee structure weaknesses.

Everyone agreed in this adversarial system, the issues are extremely emotionally charged and the reality is someone always walks away feeling like the victor or victim. Task force was committed to devoting the time and work to collaboratively and respectfully address the objectives of the enabling legislation.