



CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR HOUSING MATTERS



Reply to: 80 Jefferson St.
Hartford, CT 06106
860-278-5688 x13

NEXT MEETING

2:00 p.m.
Wednesday, December 20, 2006

Connecticut Bar Association
30 Bank St., New Britain
(860-223-4400 for directions)

Minutes of September 20, 2006 Citizens Advisory Council meeting

Attendees: Richard DeParle, Sonja Devitt, Judy Dicine, Tai Ericson, Michael Flynn, Rocco Guarnieri, Jeff Hammer, Carl Lupinacci, Roberta Palmer, David Pels, Rafie Podolsky, Richard Tenenbaum, Penny Trick, Joe Wincze

(1) PRELIMINARY MATTERS

(a) Call to order: The meeting was called to order at 2:10 p.m. by Rafie Podolsky, chairperson, at the Connecticut Bar Association, 30 Bank St., New Britain.

(b) Approval of agenda: The agenda was approved.

(c) Approval of minutes: The minutes of the June 21, 2006, meeting were approved.

(2) BIENNIAL REPORT: The Council reviewed the draft of the 2007 biennial report and made the changes listed below. The Chairperson was directed to incorporate the changes into the draft, which will be returned to the Council for final action at the December meeting.

(a) Inside front cover: Before the Council finalizes the list of Council members contained on the inside front cover, the Chairperson will contact current Council members with more than three absences to determine whether or not they wish to remain on the Council. The results will be reflected in the list of Council members on the inside front cover of the biennial report.

(b) Computerization of the housing courts – I(A): An introductory sentence should be added including a general statement in support of open access to records through the Judicial Branch website. A recommendation should be added that summary process cases in the geographical area courts should be computerized and made available on-line.

(c) Bilingual materials – I(C): A recommendation should be added that the Spanish-

language housing publications be directly accessible from the housing forms section of the Judicial Branch website.

(d) Cell phones in the courthouse – I(F): A general statement should be added that the Judicial Branch should have a mechanism to ensure that litigants, witnesses, and members of the public are not barred from getting into a courthouse because they have failed to leave their cell phone at home. Specific recommendations should be added that (a) provision be made so that a cell phone can be checked at the security desk or elsewhere and (b) sufficient pay phones or other public-use phones be available in the building. There was no consensus among those present regarding a recommendation that the prohibition against bringing cell phones into a courthouse be repealed, and no such recommendation will therefore be included in the report.

(e) Small claims hearings – I(G): Recommendations should be added that (a) a box should be added to the small claims form so that the plaintiff can check whether the case is a housing matter and (b) the Judicial Branch should address the serious delays in scheduling and hearing small claims cases that have developed since centralization was implemented.

(f) Case processing – I(K): In the last paragraph, the qualifying phrase “although there may be some additional slowdowns in Hartford and Norwalk” will be deleted.

(g) Computers and printers – II(B): A recommendation should be added calling for a laptop computer and a printer for the New London housing specialist.

(h) Supervision of housing prosecutors – III(C): The section should be adjusted to reflect the fact that the direct supervisory authority over the Hartford-New Britain housing prosecutor is permanent, not on a pilot basis.

(i) Training for new prosecutors – III(D): The section should be revised so as to recommend that housing be included in new prosecutor training, including instruction that criminal cases that are housing matters should be referred to the housing prosecutor.

(j) Support staff – III(G): A new section should be added urging the Chief State’s Attorney to upgrade the clerical support position in Bridgeport to permanent full-time status.

(k) Fifth prosecutor – III(I): A new section should be added urging the Chief State’s Attorney to seek funding if necessary to add a full-time position for a fifth housing prosecutor.

(l) Small claims booklet – IV(B): The report should recommend specifically that the booklet be updated, even if changes are minimal, so that it will have a more current publication date.

(3) HOUSING PROSECUTION

Judy Dicine reported that a New York landlord who owns property in Meriden and Waterbury agreed to make a \$25,000 charitable contribution as part of a plea arrangement, which also included a two-year period of probation. In addition, he was required to correct code violations in the properties.

(4) EVICITION PREVENTION PROGRAM

Concerns have been raised in Hartford about the operation of the state-funded Eviction Prevention Program, which is administered in Hartford by the Community Renewal Team (CRT). Until the last few years, CRT had placed its staffers at the housing court on summary process days so that rent bank agreements could be negotiated. At present, however, CRT has no on-site presence, tenants are given appointments far into the future, and telephone messages are not answered. The result has been a serious weakening of the Eviction Prevention Program. Council members indicated that similar problems have arisen at some other court locations. In addition, the funding for the Rent Bank program, which helps tenants avoid eviction by paying a portion of arrearages, is insufficient for the need. Further discussion was tabled to the December meeting.

(5) ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Raphael Podolsky, Chairperson