



CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR HOUSING MATTERS



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Minutes of March 21, 2007 Meeting of the Citizens Advisory Council for Housing Matters
Burroughs Community Center, 2470 Fairfield Ave., Bridgeport

Attendees: Jeffrey Hammer, Beth Duffy-Burns, Cynthia Teixeira, Sharon Levy, Rich DeParle, Rocco Guarnieri, Carl Lupinacci, Penny Trick, David Pels, Nick Yorio, Richard Tenenbaum, Sonja Devitt, Rafie Podolsky, Joe Wincze

Meeting was called to order at 2:25 p.m. by Richard Tenenbaum

1. Preliminary Matters

- a. The agenda was approved
- b. The minutes of December 20, 2006 meeting were approved.

2. Housing Court Operations Reports

a. Clerks' Office Issues - Beth Duffy-Burns

- i. Bridgeport Courtroom and Office Locations. At least in part because of Advisory Council objections, the Bridgeport housing courtroom was not moved out of 1061 Main St., which would have put it in a separate building from the clerk's office. It was instead relocated on March 6 from the 5th floor to the 6th floor. Accessibility modifications for the 6th floor courtroom are ongoing. Concerns remain that a sufficient number of benches have not been placed in the courtroom to accommodate all litigants. The Prosecutor's office has moved to the 6th floor office space but the housing specialists have retained their offices on the 5th floor, in light of the determination that the offices on the 6th floor available to them are not large enough.
- ii. Court house cell phone rules – Currently cell phones with cameras are tagged and bagged in most courts. Non-camera phones are not an issue.
- iii. Staffing – New Haven has one full time vacancy, Hartford has two open positions, and Bridgeport has one. The positions are posted in-house only, but it is almost impossible to get experienced people to apply for them because they are entry-level positions. These staff shortages are adversely affecting housing court operations.
- iv. Small Claims – Judge Lavery has added three new positions to centralized small claims in an effort to get the system caught up. He says that the system will be current by the end of May.
- v. Other – None

b. Prosecution Issues – Rafie Podolsky

- i. Meeting with Chief State's Attorney Kevin Kane regarding Advisory Council recommendations. A meeting cannot be accommodated before mid-April. Rafie will schedule the meeting and include the members of the Prosecution Committee.
 - ii. Police Training Manual. Training manual draft in progress. The next draft is not likely to be completed before July.
 - iii. Other issues. None
 - c. Housing Specialist Issues – Cynthia Teixeira
 - i. Staffing. Shawn Defely has moved to Rockville from New Haven, creating a housing specialist vacancy in New Haven. The New Haven vacancy has been posted internally twice without obtaining a satisfactory qualified applicant. Cynthia is confident the position will be filled and is hopeful that she will be authorized to hire from outside.
 - ii. Rockville Printer. Coming soon.
 - iii. Other issues. There is a growing concern that the Norwich space is inadequate.
 - d. Judge-related issues
 - i. Judge assignments in Bridgeport-Norwalk Housing court and elsewhere. Judge Maureen Dennis will handle the Bridgeport Housing Court until Judge Cocco returns from vacation.
 - ii. Decision availability in state libraries. Additional volunteers are sought from the Council.
 - iii. Other issues. None
 - e. Additional follow-up to 2007 biennial report – Rafie Podolsky

Rafie will request a meeting with Chief Court Administrator Judge Lavery to discuss the biennial report. Sharon Levy, Sonja Devitt, Rich DeParle, Sandy Desrosiers, and Rafie Podolsky will attend that meeting on behalf of the Council.

David Pels recommended informing the legislature's Appropriations Committee on the need for more funds to hire housing court staff. Rafie will draft a letter.

- 3. Discussion and Approval of the Council's updated small claims booklet. The publication was adopted by the Council.
- 4. Pro-Se Litigants' Assistance. Jeff Hammer

The Council discussed the various existing resources for pro se litigants. Many court locations have service centers. The centers are supervised by Tais Ericson, a former housing specialist. Jeff Hammer will ask Suzanne Colasanto if the clerks and counter staff in the geographical area courts are receiving formal training from her relative to housing procedures. The Council would like to know

if a formal relationship between the Chief Housing Clerk and the GA clerks exists or should be established.

5. Eviction Prevention Program.

The Council recommends that the entity contracted to handle DSS's Eviction Prevention program provide an on-site person at the housing court on the days that summary process actions are heard.

The Council also recommends that the Eviction Prevention Program receive additional funding from the Legislature.

6. Legislative Issues . Rafie Podolsky

S.B. 591 was opposed by both landlords and tenants at the March 14 public hearing. The bill would have repealed the duty of the municipality to pick up and store an evicted tenant's property after an eviction. The proposal remains pending in the Judiciary Committee.

7. Advisory Council Appointments. Rafie Podolsky

Tabled until June

8. Other Business. Sandra Desrosiers

Discussion was raised as to meeting locations and schedules. No action was taken and the current schedule of two meetings in Bridgeport and two in New Britain was maintained.

9. Meeting was adjourned at 4:40p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra Desrosiers, Secretary