STATE OF CONNECTICUT, CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES COMMISSION MEETING

Minutes for the April 3, 2025, meeting held via Microsoft Meetings. Agenda items are bolded.
Scribe: Gregory Bennett, DSS/OCSS

5:05pm – Call to order, provision for meeting minutes.
Roll Call
Present: CFSM Michael Ferguson, Chair, Graham Shaffer, Carolyn Signorelli, Virginia Brown, Darren Pruslow, Michael Werner, Cara Pavalock D'Amato, Rose Colon, and Susan Hamilton.

Not present: Amy Calvo MacNamara

Minutes from February meeting moved to adopt by Carolyn Signorelli and seconded by Graham Shaffer. Motion carried unanimously.

Present in the meeting who are not on the commission and signed into the chat include; Maria Lopez, Lynn Reeves, Edgar Young, Colleen Michelson, Andrew Celinski, and Gregory Bennett.

5:06 pm – Review on report from Dr. Venohr Commission for Child Support Guidelines Concerning Child Support and Arrearage Guidelines

Graham Shaffer provided an update on the report submitted Dr. Venohr. Mr. Shaffer reported that this report is effectively the document we are going to post publicly and that we are using to demonstrate to our federal partners that we have complied with all the provisions of federal law that pertain to the four-year review of our guidelines. Mr. Shaffer stated he will go through the document and highlight a few provisions and then open up to everyone for comment to offer suggested changes. If we feel that anything is not consistent with our thinking as a commission, we can bring that to Dr. Venohr's attention.

Mr. Shaffer shared his screen to go through a few parts to highlight for the group. The first page shared is page 3 into 4 of the document. Mr. Shaffer mentioned the federal requirements and in particular the requirement that the state have some sort of low-income adjustment and stated that Dr. Venohr highlighted how Connecticut complies with that requirement. Mr. Shaffer stated that he wanted to point out that it is effectively like a self-support reserve that we have established and that it is compliant with federal law to have that low adjustment.

Mr. Shaffer reported that federal rules prohibit states from treating incarceration as voluntary unemployment and thereby precluding downward modifications based on loss of income due to incarceration. And that we have a statute in Connecticut that provides for a process for modifying support down to zero, with an exception in our state statutes where the child support obligor is incarcerated for a crime committed against the custodial parents or the child. Mr. Shaffer reported this has come under scrutiny by our federal partners and we have received notice at the Department of Social Services that they do not consider that rule to be compliant with federal law. He stated that on page 4 to page 5 Dr. Venohr noted that because the rule is found in statute, it is the commission's determination that we can't change it on our own. The report notes that there has been a bill introduced that would repeal the exemption. It has been voted out of the Human Services Committee at the General Assembly, and we are awaiting the General Assembly's action on that. Magistrate

Michael Furgeson questioned if we will be in compliance because that may not happen and what would happen then? Mr. Shaffer reported that there isn't anything that we can do as a commission, the rule does not exist anywhere in the guidelines themselves. Magistrate Furgeson further stated it is a statutory rule and that by the time we have made all the updates to the guidelines, and they are formally adopted as regulations, we should have a statutory answer on that.

Graham Shaffer pointed out next that on page 19, exhibit 11 generally shows that payment outcomes are worse for those with minimum wage imputation and default orders and those eligible for the low-income adjustment. This sort of data analysis is required by federal regulations to look at a subset of your cases and evaluate all these different things. Mr. Shaffer stated he pointed this out because he thinks it supports us as we move forward with the regulation process where we have made some changes to our low-income adjustment, and we have put rules in place about IMP. For instance, this is the type of finding we may rely upon justifying some of the changes that the Commission's decided to make. Mr. Shaffer mentioned on pg 21 into pg. 22 the unemployment rate being above the official unemployment rate and that it helps justify our decision that income is going to be imputed to define full-time work as something less than 40 hours. Mr. Shaffer mentioned pg. 23 exhibit 14 showing the average weekly hours in Connecticut as of December 2024 was 33.8 hrs. per week for all employees in the private sector, suggesting income imputation at 40 hrs. per week is not always appropriate. He also mentioned on pg. 24 it states that low wage jobs do not always provide consistent hours week to week or an opportunity to work every week of the year which causes unpredictable and erratic income which can offset child support compliance.

Mr. Shaffer stated that on pg. 48 and 49 he wanted everyone to review to make sure they agree. He stated it talks about how the commission took into consideration several factors when updating the low-income adjustment. He stated that through a combination of updated economic data and the decisions we selected, we moved a sort of self-support reserve line in the shaded portion for the low-income obligor adjustment to 125% of the federal poverty level in 2024 which equates to about $362.00 per week. He goes on to state that with people with incomes that low their only real priority should be self-support. He reported on the decision to extend the guidelines out to $6,000.00 a week from $4,000.00. He then opened the floor for comments, suggestions, and critiques.

Michael Ferguson then asked if there was a timetable in terms of when we have to get back to professor Venohr if we have any changes because this is a very big document and there are a lot of graphs and things. He went on to state that we just received this a couple of days ago and wanted to make sure that all the Commission members have an opportunity to go through it and if they have any changes or comments then we can present it. He then asked what the time frame with her is.

Graham Shaffer stated there is no deadline by which we have to report back. Michael Ferguson responded that everyone should have the opportunity until the next meeting to go through it and then if we have any changes, we can discuss it at that meeting. Carolyn Signorelli then asked if this process is going to months and questioned if this will be approved before the next legislative session. Mr. Shaffer responded that he hopes that we will have it approved and explained the next steps required in obtaining the approval.

5:25pm Review of proposed regulations, including provisions concerning how to deal with situations involving more than 2 parents after the passage of the Connecticut Parentage Act:

Graham Shaffer then shared the schedule of updates to calculate the presumptive support amount with the figures provided by Dr. Venohr. He stated permission was granted to work with the legal services office within the judicial branch on a new worksheet that accommodates 3 parents. Discussion ensued regarding how many parents to put on the worksheet, whether to use multiple worksheets, percentages of income, and low-income adjustments for the low-income obligor in three parent families. Multiple scenarios of income, adjustments, and calculations were presented and discussed. Caroyln Signorelli stated she doesn't think we are going to be able to address every conceivable scenario and as long as there is a base, the court can work from there depending upon a particular situation.

Graham Shaffer then discussed provisions that correspond to the worksheet on page 2 about medical support about a presumptive order concerning unreimbursed medical expenses. He explained that for a low-income obligor with unreimbursed medical expenses, it sets a cap of 50% on the amount that they would have to pay. Mr. Shaffer questioned if the rules should be updated to reflect 33% instead of 50% for 3 parent households and all the possibilities with having more than two parents and two obligations. He stated that he drafted a rule for application and discussed the percentage breakdowns. Mr. Shaffer went on to state that he is open to any feedback on the worksheet and that there are more revisions to do to it.

Graham Shaffer's laptop's battery died, and discussion was paused momentarily. Graham Shaffer rejoined and discussion continued.

Michael Ferguson requested whether a discussion about future public dates and public hearings should occur tonight or wait until the next meeting in light of the fact that we have to still work on these other two topics. Carolyn Signorelli stated she thought it made sense to wait until we have a better idea when we are going to have product to present to the public and Michael Ferguson agreed.

6:03 pm – Adjournment

Chair Michael Ferguson stated the next meeting is May 1, 2025.