

MINUTES
Family Court Advisory Committee
NCJC Magnolia Room
December 7, 2018

The Family Court Advisory Committee (FCAC) met at the NCJC in Raleigh on Friday, December 7, 2018. Judge Regan Miller called the meeting to order at 10:06 AM. The following were present:

FCAC Members

Iris Derrick
Stephanie Gibbs
Tennelle Hann
Cheryl Howell^
Sonynia Leonard
Judge Lisa Menefee
Judge Wayne Michael
TeAndra Miller
Judge Regan Miller
Clerk Justin Minshew
Evelyn "Nikki" Smith
Rose Stout
Judge Donna Stroud
Lori Wainright

NCAOC Staff

Lori Cole, Court Management Specialist
Stephanie Nesbitt, Court Management Specialist
Stephanie Smith, Court Management Specialist
Tara Minter, Court Management Specialist

Guests

Nancy Butler, FCA District 19B
Suann Bechtel, FCA District 5

^ Via phone

Approval of Minutes

The June minutes were approved unanimously.

New Members

Judge Miller welcomed new committee members and thanked them for agreeing to serve. Judge Galen Braddy, Sonynia Leonard, The Honorable Justin Minshew, and Lori Wainright are newly appointed. Cheryl Howell, Judge Menefee, and Judge Kever were reappointed to another three-year term.

Old Business

Progress on Chapter 50 Domestic Violence Forms: Cheryl Howell explained that forms that did not conform to the statutes have been under revision. She reviewed proposed changes on each of the nine forms. FCAC members offered feedback to help further simplify some of the forms. Cheryl will make the changes and circulate the updated versions to the committee.

Parent Education: The committee discussed the current status of parent education in North Carolina. Stephanie Smith pointed out that the new statewide video resource was made in conjunction with the new Custody Mediation Orientation video and is designed to follow that presentation. Lori Cole reported that the recorded version of the PE presentation which incorporates the new video is now posted online. The complimentary booklet is online also. Stephanie Nesbitt shared that the A&V grant will fund the printing of 16,000 copies of the booklets. Courthouses may request copies of the printed booklet. There was general agreement that using the new PE resource produced by the court system will help to improve uniformity.

Family Court Training Update: Lori Cole reported that the family court overview was posted online in October. Locations and dates are still under consideration for case management training workshops to be held in 2019. They will be open to teams of judges and court staff from all districts.

Access & Visitation: Stephanie Nesbitt reported that funding for the next grant cycle was approved at the same amount as the last cycle. To continue salaries and accommodate the increased cost of benefits and longevity pay, funding of travel and training for the A&V coordinators has been reduced.

NCOAC Updates

Custody Mediation: New staff is being trained in several districts due to the redistricting and staff turnover. It takes about 3 months for a new staff person to be fully trained. The Custody Mediation Advisory Committee has been working on a new DV screening protocol. It is being piloted now and should help to screen out cases that are not appropriate for mediation due to safety or other concerns.

Domestic Violence: Nothing to report

Office Language and Access Services (OLAS): Nothing to report.

Court Improvement Project (CIP): DSS is continuing to host convenings for the counties that were not present for the first one in February 2018. These are meetings for juvenile abuse/neglect/dependency teams to gather and discuss improving case management and court practice. A schedule of four sessions has been distributed to the remaining counties. Those meetings will take place in Morganton and Raleigh.

Civil Domestic Case Management Survey & Summary Results (“Report”)

This report was a collaborative effort between Research, Policy & Planning and Human Resources. Court Programs was involved in the initial data gathering phase of the study only. The report contains a recommendation about reclassifying positions (this was the reason why the study was initially requested) and a recommendation to “equalize” district court staff resources across the state. This new matrix would be based on reallocating existing resources, not adding needed resources. Family court judges and staff believe that second recommendation would end family court as it currently exists.

Committee members received a mailed paper copy of the recent AOC survey and summary results document soon after Judge Warren shared it with the family court chiefs during their fall conference. Judge Miller explained that the family court chiefs and administrators met on November 15 to discuss the report.

That group decided to write a letter to the Chief Justice and Judge Warren requesting a meeting to discuss the report recommendations. A meeting has been set for December 17 at 1 pm with Judge Warren, Brad Fowler, and the family court chiefs. It is uncertain whether the Chief Justice will be present.

Domestic attorneys Rose Stout and Stephanie Gibbs voiced their concern about the potential end to family court. It would lead to a loss of vision and a loss of a sense of purpose. The committee agreed that it is unfair to treat family cases like everything else and that having the domestic attorneys participate in the meeting with Judge Warren would be helpful.

Meeting Dates

The 2019 meeting dates will be March 1, June 7, September 6, and December 6.