



COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

February 24, 2022
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Presiding: Justice John C. Few

In attendance:

Members:

The Hon. John C. Few
Hannah Honeycutt
Charles Boykin
Anne Caywood
Elizabeth Chambliss
Judge Childs
Larry Cunningham
Molly Day
Will Dillard
Betsy Goodale
Olivia Jones
John Kassel
Tonnya Kohn

Chris Koon
Tope Leyimu
Anthony Livoti
Judge Malphrus
Clarkson McDow
Al Parker
Aparna Polavarapu
Mary Sharp
Hon. Joseph Strickland
La'Jessica Stringfellow
Richele Taylor
Hon. John E. Waites
Jeff Yungman

Guests:

Kabrina Bass, *Midlands Mediation Center*
Jason Bobertz
Amy Cox, *Spartanburg County Clerk of Court*
Sunita Kumar, *Meeting & Mediation Center of Charleston*

Jennifer Olmert, *Upstate Mediation Center*
David Ross
Megan Seiner
Lucy Banks Smith

1. Welcome and Introductions

Justice Few welcomed everyone to the commission meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves since the group had not been able to meet in person for some time.

2. Approval of October 28, 2021 Minutes

Chris Koon moved to approve the minutes from the Commission's October 28th meeting. Clarkson McDown seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously. Justice Few noted that the Supreme Court has approved the inclusion of past SCATJ Commission meeting minutes and agendas on the Commission's website.

3. Spartanburg Pro Se Day - Amy Cox, Spartanburg County Clerk of Court

Clerk of Court Amy Cox gave a presentation on the recent Spartanburg County Pro Se Day. She detailed how judges and court staff planned the event, emphasizing that it took a considerable amount of legwork on the front end, including reviewing files to identify which cases would be appropriate for the docket. Court staff dedicated a significant amount of time to contacting litigants to confirm scheduling, ensuring that their paperwork was complete ahead of time, and answering questions. Judge Thigpen, one of the Family Court judges involved with this effort, developed a special notice of hearing form with extra information and details that would prevent a case from being continued or dismissed.

On the day of the event, each of Spartanburg's three Family Court judges handled approximately six cases per hour. There were lots of staff on hand to help, including bailiffs, clerk of court staff, court reporters, secretaries, and sheriffs deputies. In addition to ensuring that paperwork was complete ahead of time, staff had plaintiff and witness scripts, blank final orders, and blank orders of continuance ready for use.

A question was asked about whether or not clerks helping litigants identify items that might be missing from their pro se divorce packet (available online) would constitute the unauthorized practice of law. Justice Few responded that he did not believe that it would and that this type of help is permitted.

4. Community Mediation in South Carolina - Jennifer Olmert, Upstate Mediation Center; Kabrina Bass, Midlands Mediation Center; Sunita Kumar, Meeting & Mediation Center of Charleston

The executive directors from South Carolina's three mediation centers—Upstate Mediation Center, Midlands Mediation Center, and the Meeting & Mediation Center of Charleston—gave a presentation on the history of the community mediation movement in the United States and an overview of the work of each organization. These three centers are the only organizations that offer free and low-cost mediation services to litigants in South Carolina. They also offer mediation services outside the court system, such as community mediation and police mediation.

5. Executive Director Update - Hannah Honeycutt

Hannah began with an update on the statewide legal needs assessment being conducted by the Center for Housing & Community Studies at UNC Greensboro and sponsored by the Commission, the SC Bar, and the NMRS Center on Professionalism at UofSC Law. The timeline for completion of the project has been pushed back to October due to some unavoidable delays

caused by the Omicron surge. The researchers just completed the key informant interview phase, in which they conducted over a dozen interviews with legal aid and justice system stakeholders around the state. They are due to begin the focus group and survey phases of the project within the next week. Hannah emphasized the importance of this project, the first legal needs assessment of its kind that South Carolina has ever done.

Next Hannah gave an update on the SC Family Court Summit she has been assisting Betsy Goodale in planning. The summit is scheduled for March 18th and will include nationally renowned speakers from the National Center for State Courts and the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS), as well as the Indiana court system.

The SC Legal Service Provider group that Hannah has been convening since 2020 continues to meet regularly. They have most recently hosted speakers on the potential legal needs of Afghan refugees currently being resettled in South Carolina, and a Q&A with Megan Seiner about the SC Bar Foundation's current grant cycle. Hannah has been talking for some time with the current co-chairs (Lana Kleiman of Charleston Legal Access and Kate Patterson of Root & Rebound) about the future of the group and how to improve it.

Hannah has been working on a new project to improve the "[Looking for Legal Help?](#)" section of the SCATJ website. Students from Georgetown Law's Civ Tech Practicum class are working on an app that will help site users identify the type of legal need that they have, conduct a simple financial eligibility screening, and connect them with service providers in their area, as well as self-help resources for their specific legal issue. Hannah hopes that the app will make this section of the website more useful and easier to navigate.

Hannah reminded members to follow the Commission on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#) and to fill out their SCATJ Member Spotlight survey if they have not already. She also asked for all members to send her one or two "myths" about access to justice that they have heard from members of the legal profession—or something new they have learned since becoming members of the Commission—for a new social media series she is planning.

6. Committee Updates

a. Commission Development - *Chris Koon & Mary Sharp*

Chris Koon gave the update for the Commission Development Committee, whose membership is as follows:

- Micah Caskey
- Larry Cunningham
- Chris Koon
- Tope Leyimu
- Andrea Loney
- Mary Lucas
- Dawn Przirembel
- Megan Seiner
- Mary Sharp
- Jeff Yungman

The committee made several proposals to amend the Commission’s establishing order that would clarify the number of seats on the Commission, stagger membership terms, formalize the new “special advisor” membership category, and add ex officio seats for the SC Bar President and the Executive Director of the SC Bar Foundation. After discussion, Chris Koon, as co-chair of the committee, moved for the Commission to approve the suggested amendments and submit them to the Supreme Court for approval. Aparna Polavarapu seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

Chris also reported that the committee discussed changing their name to “Governance” instead of “Development” because the word “development” is usually associated with fundraising, which is not a function of this committee. There was no opposition to this change.

b. Outreach & Communications - *Will Dillard & Betsy Goodale*

Will Dillard gave the update for the Outreach & Communications Committee, whose membership is as follows:

- Judge Addy
- Justin Bradley
- Charles Boykin
- Elizabeth Chambliss
- Judge Childs
- Will Dillard
- Betsy Goodale
- Anthony Livoti
- Margie Bright Matthews
- Clarkson McDow
- Aparna Polavarapu
- La’Jessica Stringfellow
- Richele Taylor

During their initial meetings, this committee identified several goals and areas of focus, including alleviating some of the burden of speaking engagements about the Justice Gap Report and other access to justice issues that usually falls on Hannah alone. The committee also worked on identifying targets of communications efforts (legislative caucuses, media, the judiciary and clerks of court, and the general community) and developing key messaging (findings from the Justice Gap Report and upcoming Statewide Legal Needs Assessment, the economic impact of access to justice and legal aid, and tailoring messaging to different groups).

c. Self-Represented Litigants - *Olivia Jones & Molly Day*

Olivia Jones gave the update for the Self-Represented Litigants Committee, whose membership is as follows:

- Anne Caywood
- Molly Day
- Olivia Jones
- John Kassel
- Tonnya Kohn
- Judge Malphrus

- Brandy McBee
- Al Parker
- David Ross
- Judge Strickland
- Judge Waites

During their initial meetings, the committee identified three areas on which they plan to focus their efforts: Self-help forms, including assessing the need for updates and ensuring that self-represented litigants have access to uniform information across all counties; educating attorneys about the benefits of pro bono work and providing assistance to self-represented litigants, with the goal of reducing the stigma associated with this work and reducing the perception that it competes with business for private attorneys; and educating the judiciary and clerks of court about the distinction between offering “legal advice” and “legal information” to self-represented litigants.

7. Future Meeting Dates - *Justice Few*

Justice Few announced the dates for the second and third commission meetings of 2022: Thursday, June 23rd and Thursday, October 20th. Specific times and locations will be announced closer to those dates.

8. Other Business

No one brought forth any other business to discuss.

9. Adjourn