



COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

June 24, 2021
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Presiding: Justice John C. Few

In attendance:

Members:

The Hon. John C. Few
Hannah Honeycutt
Anne Caywood
Elizabeth Chambliss
Larry Cunningham
Will Dillard
Betsy Goodale
Olivia Jones
Tonnya Kohn

Chris Koon
Clarkson McDow
Aparna Polavarapu
Dawn Prziembel
Hon. Joseph Strickland
La'Jessica Stringfellow
Richele Taylor
Hon. John E. Waites
Jeff Yungman

Guests:

Rusty Infinger, SCLS (filling in for Al Parker)
Ginny Jones, SC Judicial Branch
Michelle Mapp, ACLU of SC
Pamela Robinson, UofSC Law

David Ross
Joseph Schottenfeld, NAACP
Megan Seiner
Martina Tiku, NAACP

1. Welcome and Introductions

Justice Few welcomed everyone to the commission meeting. The meeting was recorded.

Justice Few also gave an update on the discussion we had at our last meeting about piloting the provision of CLE credit for attorneys who volunteer for the Charleston Housing Court. The Supreme Court is continuing to discuss this issue and Justice Few hopes to have more to report soon.

2. Approval of February 25, 2021 Minutes

Justice Few called for everyone to put their votes for approval or disapproval of the minutes into the chat feature of the Zoom call. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. The Palmetto LEADER at UofSC Law - Pamela Robinson

Pam Robinson, director of the pro bono program at UofSC Law, gave an update on the operations of the new Palmetto LEADER. The LEADER is a fully mobile facility that can be driven around the state for clinics and other events in rural areas. LEADER stands roughly for “Legal Advocacy and Education Resources.”

The bus can carry up to ten people and has been used to conduct several clinics so far in rural parts of the state in partnership with SC Bar Pro Bono Program, Lowcountry Legal Volunteers, and others. Pam hopes that the bus will also be used by the clinical program participants at UofSC Law and is working on building other local partnerships.

Pam shared the link to the [Palmetto LEADER's webpage](#) that includes a list of upcoming events and information about how to volunteer.

4. Family Court Summit - Betsy Goodale

Betsy shared plans for a program she has been developing in collaboration with Hannah and two attorneys who practice in family court. The idea stemmed from Betsy's discussions with attorneys and judges around the state who all expressed a need to address persistent issues in family court, many involving the high percentage of self-represented litigants that come through that court. Additionally, at least 2/3 of the calls that the Bar's pro bono program gets involve family court issues. After some research, Betsy realized that these issues are common nationwide and has sought input from experts from the National Center for State Courts and IAALS at the University of Denver.

The Family Court Summit will be scheduled for October. The ultimate goal will be to issue reports summarizing the ideas and recommendations from the summit that can be shared with judges and other interested parties, including the Chief Justice and the Family Court Advisory Committee.

5. Equal Justice Works Fellowship at ACLU of South Carolina - Michelle Mapp

Michelle Mapp gave a presentation detailing her upcoming work in the area of eviction prevention. For the next two years, Michelle will serve at the ACLU of South Carolina as an Equal Justice Works Fellow sponsored by the Racial Justice Fund at Alston & Bird. Her project

attempts to address a root cause of poverty in the state by preventing evictions and the repercussions associated with evictions.

Michelle's project will employ a three-pronged strategy to support tenant right to counsel enabling legislation in South Carolina. First is to build a long-term legal structure to support housing court throughout the state, replicating Richmond's Housing Justice Program. Second is to build a coalition of landlords, tenants, and landlord-tenant law advocates by replicating Cleveland's Housing Justice Alliance. Third is to demonstrate the economic impact of eviction by commissioning a cost-benefit analysis of the economic effects South Carolina could realize by enacting tenant right to counsel in eviction cases.

Michelle pointed out that her internship at the ACLU of SC and her time as a volunteer intern with the Charleston Housing Court program during law school inspired her work in this area.

6. NAACP Richland County Navigator Program - *Joseph Schottenfeld & Martina Tiku*

Joe Shottenfeld and Martina Tiku, from the NAACP (National) Office of General Counsel, made a presentation about a new program they have built in Richland County. The pilot program launched in February and has so far helped over 100 people and has trained over 60 community-volunteer navigators. The pilot program was meant to test whether it could be so community-embedded that it could actually help prevent eviction in the first place. Of the 100 people they have helped, 30-40% have been pre-eviction filing.

The program seeks to equip individuals with the resources and tools they need to achieve greater housing stability by empowering community members to support one another. Navigators remain available to clients until all their goals are achieved, not only making referrals to legal, financial, and social services, but also following up to ensure those connections are made.

In addition to the community-volunteer navigators, the program has also partnered with the Richland County Bar and Nelson Mullins to provide pro bono legal assistance to tenants if needed.

7. Executive Director Update - *Hannah Honeycutt*

Hannah updated the commission on several things she has been working on, including nurturing the SC Legal Services Provider Group and the Wellness Initiative for its members. Hannah continues to host a listserv for providers to share ideas and questions, and hosts monthly Zoom meetings for everyone to come together and discuss issues. There is usually a speaker at each meeting that presents on a topic relevant to the provider community.

The most recent installment of the Wellness Initiative for the provider group was a CLE called "Law School Debt & the Path to Financial Freedom." Jordan Roberts, an attorney and financial advisor at Parallel Financial in Greenville was the speaker for that event and Hannah emphasized that his presentation was excellent. Hannah thanked Richele Taylor for acting as moderator for that CLE so that she could focus on the logistics of hosting a large online event.

Hannah also drew attention to the Justice Index's 2021 update. The Justice Index is a program of the National Center for Access to Justice at Fordham Law School. It ranks states based on best-practice access to justice policies. South Carolina scored 23.69 out of 100, ranks 44th out of all states, and ranks fourth lowest among southern states in this most recent update. South Carolina ranks dead last in the number of legal services attorneys we have per 10,000 people in the eligible population. The benchmark is ten per 10,000; we have .4 per 10,000.

The attorneys at Nelson Mullins are continuing to work on the commission restructuring plan that we discussed at our last meeting. Hannah hopes to have more to report on that soon.

Finally, Hannah encouraged everyone to fill out their spotlight surveys for the commission's social media pages that was sent out several months ago.

8. 2021 Justice Gap Report - *Hannah Honeycutt, Will Dillard, & Elizabeth Chambliss*

Justice Few announced that the formal (virtual) launch event for the [Justice Gap Report](#) is currently scheduled for August 3rd, but will be confirmed soon. Justice Few thanked Will Dillard, Elizabeth Chambliss, and Hannah for their work on this project. He encouraged everyone to think about how we as a commission and as individuals can use this report to continue our good work.

Will talked about the history of the project, which began back in 2018. He thanked our data partners—Court Administration, DSS, SC Legal Services, the US Bankruptcy Court, and the SC Bar. He explained how they decided to narrow down the data requests so that the data would demonstrate the relevant access to justice issues. Will also shared some of the numbers detailing which parties had representation and for what types of cases.

Elizabeth then talked about the goals of the report and highlighted some of the findings. They hoped with this initial report to establish a template for annual reporting and to identify specific areas of need. The report is organized around three themes: the scope and nature of legal need, access to attorneys, and representation in court.

Elizabeth also gave a demonstration of the [interactive data tool](#)—developed for us by the Legal Services Corporation—that accompanies the report. LSC has assured us that we will be able to update the tool yearly and have offered technical support for those updates.

Hannah then announced the next phase of the commission's work to document the justice gap in South Carolina. The commission has partnered with the SC Bar and the NMRS Center on Professionalism at UofSC School of Law to conduct South Carolina's first-ever comprehensive statewide legal needs assessment. She gave an overview of the study's methodology and timeline. Research will be conducted by the [Center for Housing and Community Studies](#) at UNC Greensboro, who just completed a [similar study](#) in North Carolina. They hope to be able to begin the project as early as mid-July.

9. Future Meeting Dates

The next commission meeting will be held on October 28, 2021. The meeting location will be announced closer to the date.

10. Other Business

Jeff Yungman announced that, because of its success as a pilot project (which was initially endorsed by the commission), the Charleston Housing Court is seeking to expand to other magistrate courts in the Charleston area.

11. Adjourn