

MINUTES
BENCH BAR COMMITTEE
Monday, February 4, 2019
By C. Edward S. Mitchell, Chairman

Attendance

Present were: Judge Lovecchio, Judge Linhardt, Aaron Biichle, Brian Bluth, Bill Carlucci, Robert Cronin, Robert Elion, Michele Frey, Jessica Harlow, Jennifer Heverly, Ed Mitchell, Joseph Rider, Cliff Rieders, Adrienne Stahl, Ryan Tira, Jeff Yates

Old Business

Backlog of Criminal Cases

The backlog of criminal cases remains a problem. In an effort to reduce the backlog, the Court is scheduling pretrials in some misdemeanor cases, adding two additional weeks of criminal trials, scheduling non-jury criminal trials as backup cases to scheduled jury trials and assigning criminal trials to Judge Linhardt for offenses which have been charged since he left the DA's office.

Jury Questionnaires

Jury Questionnaires for use in civil cases will be a topic for discussion at a conference of the Civil Trial Attorneys which has been rescheduled for March 6, 2019 at noon in Judge Linhardt's courtroom.

Veteran's Court

This has been started January 28, 2019. The new Veteran's Court is intended to provide rehabilitative services for Veteran's who have been charged with non-violent crimes and have been identified as suffering from mental health conditions and/or substance abuse disorders.

New Business

Application for Grants for Drug Court and Veteran's Court

An application has been made to the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts for grants for purchase of drug testing equipment, iPads, transportation and training in support of the drug court. A second application has been made for implementation funding in support of the new Veteran's Court program for training volunteer mentors and providing transportation to participants. The grants, if approved, will not be funded by any monies from the County. They are budgeted to the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts and are available for the various County Courts upon application.

Although the County Commissioners approved the applications, such approval is not a requirement for the applications.

Funding Difficulties with Commissioners

The Court is experiencing problems with the County Commissioners funding necessary positions in the Court system including law clerks and probation officers.

Delays by the Commissioners in filling vacancies in the probation department have occurred.

The Judges believe the Commissioners are wrongly accusing the Court of being insensitive to the need for cost saving.

It was suggested that, subject to approval by all Judges, a committee of the Bar could be formed to meet with the Commissioners to attempt to improve the communications between the Commissioners and the Court.

Restructuring of Fees in the Prothonotary's Office

There is no action being taken by the Prothonotary to eliminate fees for discontinuance of cases by adding them to the original filing fee. Cases remain open because of reluctance of parties to pay the currently required fee in order to discontinue the case.

CLE Credits for Pro Bono Work

Up to three (3) CLE Credits can now be obtained by providing five (5) hours of pro bono work per one (1) CLE Credit.

Clean Slate Law

Pennsylvania's Clean Slate Law is now in effect. It allows Pennsylvanians with non-violent misdemeanor records to have those records sealed if they have stayed out of trouble for ten (10) years and paid all fines.

Filing Reports of Guardian of the Person and of the Estate

The change requiring reports of guardians of the person and/or estate are to be submitted through the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania web portal using the Pennsylvania Guardianship Tracking System (GTS) application pertains only to guardians of adult incapacitated persons and not to guardians of minors.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 6, 2019 at noon in the Law Association Executive Offices.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Edward S. Mitchell
Chairman