

MINUTES
BENCH BAR COMMITTEE
Monday, November 1, 2021
By C. Edward S. Mitchell, Chairman

Attendance

Participants were: Judge Butts, Judge McCoy, Judge Linhardt, Judge Tira, Ed Mitchell, Jessica Harlow, Brian Bluth, Michele Frey, Adrienne Stahl, David Wilk, Tom Waffenschmidt, Jennifer Heverly

Method: the meeting was conducted by conference call.

Judge McCoy recently sent a letter to the local bar discussing the great need for pro bono attorneys for PFA cases. Jennifer Heverly expressed interest in a subcommittee or a meeting with other lawyers and judges and North Penn Legal Services to brainstorm ideas on how to improve the pro bono process. She also mentioned some of the shortage is due to low staffing in her office. She requested one month or so for her to settle in with the departure of long time staff member Danna Rich Collins. Judge Linhardt and Judge Tira expressed an interest in participating in such a meeting or discussion.

Judge Butts reminded everyone that the new attorney admission ceremony will be held Thursday December 2, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. This will be an in person event. It is too difficult to have the event in a hybrid model, with both in person and online participation. Judge Butts also mentioned that the jury reporting rate for the latest trial term was about the same as the reporting rate pre-Covid.

Judge Linhardt mentioned the adjustments in schedules due to Judge Lovecchio's departure from Courtroom #4. Senior Judge Brown will be covering for 10 days per month, doing mostly criminal cases. Senior Judge Anderson will be providing coverage for 5 days a month, doing mostly civil and family law cases. There may be some scheduling delays caused by this change. Judge Butts noted that additional coverage has been requested, but there is limited availability of senior judges. For cases involving recusals, they are trying to get those cases reassigned to active judges, unless it is a full bench recusal.

Judge Tira noted that he had seen an increase in Covid delaying or postponing matters in the past few weeks. With the schedule issues, he asked that attorneys on the trial list notify the Court of settlement as soon as possible, so they might be able to re-schedule that time. He also indicated that it would be a good practice to provide courtesy copies of motions or other filings expected by the Court, that might not be noticed by Court Administration as requiring action by the Court.

Adrienne Stahl noted that there are two vacancies in Court Administration at this time, and they are working to fill those positions. April McDonald is now the Deputy Court Administrator. Any invoices being sent to Keely Hitchens in the past should be sent to Adrienne. She encouraged use of the courtscheduling@lyco.org email address.

Jennifer Heverly asked if there had been a change in the courthouse masking policy. Judge Butts confirmed there had not, and things were still being handled on a courtroom by courtroom basis. She did note other departments (like the Sheriff's office) may have implemented new policies.

Ed Mitchell relayed a concern raised by a member of the committee who was not able to be on the call. The member had complained and sent photos of the furniture in the lawyers lounge that is in poor condition and/or broken. Ed remembered that the Lycoming Law Association had donated that furniture in the past. Adrienne Stahl noted that she is working on getting new vinyl chairs for that area.

Ed Mitchell noted the meeting dates for 2022 as follows: February 7, May 2, August 1 and November 7.

Michele Frey reminded members of the PBA ratings for judicial candidates produced by the JEC but not widely circulated in the newspapers.

With no other issues, the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be February 7, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Edward S. Mitchell
Chairman