MSBA Legal Services Section Council Meeting Minutes

November 14, 2016

Present: Dave Pantzer, Joe Mack, Sarah Frush, Amy Hennen, Shana Roth-Gormley, Harriet Robinson, Judge Bill Dunn, Amy Petkovsek, Judge Mark Scurti, Michelle Ewert, Sheryl Sne, Elizabeth Adams

The meeting was called to order by Dave Pantzer at 6:30pm. Introductions were made around the room.

The previous meeting’s minutes were reviewed. Sheryl Snee made a motion to accept the minutes, Dave Pantzer seconded, motion carried.

Old Business:

Dave Pantzer said that the deadline for the section newsletter is tomorrow, 11/15. Laure Ruth is planning to do a follow up story on the success of the Limited Scope Conference this fall. Sandy Brown is also planning a story on collaborative law. Amy Hennen, standing in for Susan Francis, reported that Susan is still planning to stick to the 11/15 deadline for newsletter articles.

Treasurer’s Report:

Michelle Ewert presented the Treasurer’s report. We are still waiting to see how many of last year’s section members end up re-joining and paying the $10 in dues. As of today, 121 have dropped the section membership, 13 new members have joined, and there are 95 unpaid members. The current membership sits at 438. (Over 200 have paid the dues for this year thus far). Judge Scurti said that it is not unusual to see a drop in membership when it is the section’s first year paying dues. He said that he would not be too alarmed at this point, there are also ways to market and reach out to those who dropped their section membership, and find out why.

Limited scope conference recap:

Dave Pantzer provided a recap of our section’s involvement in this conference. There were 100 attendees at the conference. The day had a great vibe to it. The program for the conference listed our section as a sponsor and posted resources on our website. Dave is a member of the committee that will be analyzing the results of the conference, there was a survey sent out today to attendees. The conference was recorded, and there have been 75 views of the video thus far. The group of people that registered was larger than the actual attendance for the day. The attendees reported that the breakout sessions were very helpful. Judge Scurti mentioned that in the future, if nonmembers attend, can have the cost of dues included in the cost of a training, so that they become section members. Joe Mack mentioned that if any section council members know any private attorneys, please let them know that Civil Justice is a statewide organization. Amy Petkovsek suggests possibly checking in with attendees 6 months after the conference to determine if there was an impact in practice and limited scope representation. Sarah Frush said that this type of representation needs to start happening. Sheryl Snee said that she personally spent 84 hours on a family law case pro bono through MVLS, and this cannot be done by private attorneys on a regular basis. Judge Scurti asked if Judicare could count as limited scope, and mentioned that this could be an option to promote. Harriet Robinson said that she thinks so, and will look into it. Dave Pantzer said to let him now if you want to assist the Limited Scope group in taking the next steps to increase this type of representation. Dave will reach out to Reena Shah and coordinate our volunteers with the Access to Justice committee. Sarah Frush said that she is interested in assisting.
Sheryl Snee said that it may be helpful to attend local bar association meetings and talk about the pros and cons of limited scope. Dave said that he is working on a custody and divorce self-help workbook that may be related.

Judge Scurti said that the Baltimore City Bar Association Executive committee reached out to him, and asked that he present on limited scope in district court. The first week of December is New Judges Training school, and this issue will be brought before the new judges. If the judges are also in support and encourage this type of representation, we might get more traction out of it. Judge Scurti asked for any additional information, forms, and examples of possible opportunities, and said that it is a short turnaround, as the judges training is in the first week of December.

Fee Shifting Training:

Joe Mack said that fee shifting as a model for increased access to justice is a possible training topic, especially in the consumer protection context. He suggested that an in person training might not be the best way to get the information out. Perhaps use adobe presenter program, where the attendee can remotely see the powerpoint and the speaker. This was done recently by Civil Justice with a presentation on landlord tenant law by Matt Hill at the Public Justice Center, and was successful. There are positives and negatives, but the benefits of the remote format seem to outweigh the negatives. It would also create a training that could be edited later. Also, there is no tension of a live training being recorded. Sheryl Snee asked, is this like a webinar? Joe said that this is like a webinar, but can be watched at the attendee’s leisure. Elizabeth Adams asked how the attendees are able to ask questions of the presenters. Joe said that the questions at these trainings are not always super helpful anyways, and there is a date and time given to attendees during which the presenter will be available for follow up. Sheryl Snee asked if people can submit questions and then have the presenter come back for additional presentations. Sarah Frush mentioned that she participated in a series of webinars through the courts’ Access to Justice program, attendees signed up, but many did not show up for the webinar.

Judge Dunn suggested having follow up answers available to members only through the list serve. Judge Scurti said that they are looking at doing the courts’ Access to Justice webinars on a more regular basis, for example, the third Tuesday of every month.

The section council was in consensus that online would be a better format for this training than in person. Joe Mack said that the next steps are developing an agenda and speakers. Susan Francis is planning to assist, and Sandy Brown and Michelle Ewert also expressed interest in assisting. Joe gave a case example, Lockett v. Blue Ocean, where the Public Justice Center had a fee petition approved.

MSBA Annual Conference Session Topic

There was a discussion of possible ideas for the MSBA Annual Conference Session. Sheryl Snee mentioned the guardianship handbook, which Judge Scurti said was reproduced three years ago. Elizabeth Adams mentioned bail review. Amy Petkovsek discussed needing to find another section to partner with, this has brought in more attendees in the last two years. Amy Hennen mentioned that the bankruptcy section is a strong section, and could tie in a session with members of the federal bench. Amy Petkovsek suggested possibly SIJS, as there are multiple legal services organizations and private attorneys involved in this, and there are still thousands of minors needing legal assistance. Michelle Ewert said that this can be a complex topic. Dave Pantzer said that there is a book being developed on
family law, to assist self-represented litigants through the process of divorce and custody, until they are ready to talk to an attorney. The book is designed to be used by a client and attorney working together. Judge Dunn said that from the MSBA’s perspective, going with another section, such as family law, is a great idea for budget reasons. The section will decide on a topic at the next meeting in early January, as session topics are due to MSBA in February 2017.

Discussion of Partners for Justice funding:

Our budget has gone from around $10,000, to around $4,000, and is based on the dues that are paid by members. In the past, our section has funded Partners for Justice, and this is not the case at this time. It is recognized that the mission of the Partners for Justice Conference is closely aligned with the goals of this section. Judge Scurti said that if this section is going to make a sponsorship request, this would be an appropriate request. In the past, it was seen as a direct expense, not a sponsorship requested. Thus, the section will ask MSBA to co-sponsor the Partners for Justice Conference, along with the Delivery of Legal Services section. The leadership team of this council will work on this request ASAP.

Judge Scurti also reported that there is a new Executive Director for MSBA, as of December 1st. Victor Velasquez has been selected, he has a strong legal services background with the DC Bar, and lives in Timonium.

Pat Yevics:

Pat is staying on with MSBA after her recent retirement, and has offered her assistance to the section. Judge Scurti suggested having her ready to present something to the group at the next meeting, as she is only staying on for a six month term.

Legislative Update:

The legislative committee for our section is Laure Ruth, Michelle Ewert, and Victor Berger. As items come up, they will notify the section council members. Any members of the section should email one of these three individuals if they see a bill that they believe our section should be addressing.

Other Business:

- Keep section member nomination in mind as we move forward
- ABA Legal Check Ups: Have reached out for assistance, it is like an online triage, can match legal solutions with those who need assistance. Many around the table said that their programs are already doing this, and can send their legal check up scripts to Dave.

Next meeting: January 23, 2017, MSBA Headquarters, and March 27th.