

**LAW AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE
MINUTES
June 18, 2007**

The Law and Justice Committee of the DeKalb County Board met on Monday, June 18, 2007 @ 6:30p.m. in the DeKalb County Administration Building's Conference Room East. Chairman Richard Osborne called the meeting to order. Members present were Marlene Allen, Sally DeFauw, Ken Andersen, Howard Lyle, and Ruth Anne Tobias. John Hulseberg was absent. Others present were Judge Klein, Regina Harris, and Jill Olson, Executive Director of CASA.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Moved by Mr. Andersen, seconded by Mr. Lyle, and it was carried unanimously to approve the minutes for May 2007.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Judge Klein asked if he could address the committee this evening on an update from his office? The committee agreed to place him as item #4A.) Judge Klein Request.

Moved by Ms. Tobias, seconded by Ms. Allen, and it was carried unanimously to approve the amended agenda.

CASA SUMMARY REPORT

Ms. Jill Olson, Executive Director, for CASA in DeKalb County, briefly updated the committee on her department.

Ms. Olson said that CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate and that they are a non-for-profit organization that is made up of volunteer citizens from DeKalb County. They are child advocates for children that have been neglected or abused. They have been in DeKalb County since 1993. They have served over 450 children in that time. Currently they are serving 90 kids with 54 advocates.

She explained that their caseload has been pretty steady over the last few years. In 2004 CASA served 114 kids and in 2006 they served around 103 kids. Neglect cases are the bulk of their caseload and they have about 83 of those.

Most of their volunteers have served over 5 years. They are very grateful for the funds that they receive from the County. They use the funds to train their advocates and for continuing education classes. Most of the advocates are full-time employed adults. They range in age from their mid-20's to their late 70's. They feel that they are very fortunate to have these types of people volunteering their time for the CASA program.

All of the attorneys that take these cases are pro bono. They have 23 part-time attorneys who have volunteered their time.

Judge Klein said that they have had success in the courtrooms with the CASA cases and that he cannot emphasize enough how important CASA is. Before CASA, children went into the system under DCFS. He does not know what DCFS' current caseload is. Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services, both the same story. With a CASA advocate, they are assigned one case and stays with that case until the end. DCFS has a program, he thinks, and they get burnt out. When they do he feels that they trade cases, so that consequently, a lot of times the Court will hear from a DCFS worker that "this was someone else's case and I'm just taking over." You never hear that from a CASA worker.

JUDICIAL UPDATE

Judge Klein approached the committee this evening regarding a fifth judge who has been assigned to DeKalb County. He said that the judge will be starting at the courthouse in three weeks and that the State will pay for the judge's salary and the courtroom is already finished. He feels however, that the new judge may create additional support from the Circuit Clerk's office, a new assistant public defender hired and the State's Attorney would have to ask for a new person if one is needed.

He also said that because we have been assigned a new judge, DeKalb County will have to send a judge down to the Sandwich court once a month. Currently Kane County was covering this courtroom, but now it will be our responsibility.

PUBLIC DEFENDER'S REPORT

Ms. Regina Harris, DeKalb County Public Defender, said that when she reviewed the breakdown of cases versus clients she found that one of her attorneys, Mr. Olson, is extremely overworked. Mr. Olson handles the juvenile criminal, juvenile abuse and neglect cases and domestic violence. Those are the three most intensively, emotional court calls for an attorney to handle. He should not have all three of them and that will be changing. He has 380 cases that he is handling, with 197 clients. That is so far out of bounds from the guidelines, that she will be redistributing some of the caseload.

Because of this workload that Mr. Olson has, she will be approaching the committee at budget time and will be asking for a new assistant.

She then said that another attorney, Mr. Criswell handles about 188 cases and serves 71 clients, which is about 20 cases higher than it should be.

Ms. Harris feels that her staff is going to get burned out from being overworked. She has a very good staff and she does not want to lose them.

Judge Klein said that we rely on an adversarial system in our courts to find the truth of a situation. But in order to get at the truth the two sides need to be evenly matched, not just in qualifications but also in the ability to prepare for a case. And when one side is dealing with too large of a caseload the ability to reach the truth is hurt and the system is flawed.

Ms. Harris also said that when caseloads are too large instead of getting a case finished the first time around the public defender's office ends up having to spend time after a conviction on the case on post-conviction reviews.

She is currently fully staffed as of June 4th, which is good news.

COURT SERVICES REPORTS

Ms. Margi Gilmour, Court Services Director, was absent from the meeting. Chairman Osborne said that if anyone had any questions pertaining to her Adult and Juvenile Court Services Report that they could call Ms. Gilmour at her office.

JAIL REPORT

Chairman Osborne said that the average daily population for the month of May was 103. If anyone should have any questions pertaining to this report, they should call the Sheriff, he further stated.

Before adjourning, Mr. Andersen brought up the subject again regarding the Real Estate Transfer Tax and how possibly the county should look at this alternative to help fund the jail. The committee directed Mr. Andersen to speak with Mr. Gary Hanson, DeKalb County's Deputy County Administrator, about this idea.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Mr. Andersen, seconded by Ms. Allen, and it was carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Osborne, Chairman

RO:mcs