

Co-Chairs

NH Citizens Commission On The State Courts PO Box 419 Concord, NH
03302-0419

Dear Commissioners:

I attended your Listening Session this afternoon in Portsmouth. I did not speak, however, and now offer my suggestions in writing.

I'm an attorney in Massachusetts. I live in Stratham, NH and am in the process of applying for admission on Motion in New Hampshire. Since 1989 I've represented parents and children in neglect and abuse cases filed by the MA Dep't of Social Services in Lawrence, Haverhill and Newburyport, MA. The suggestions I offer are based on my experience there. I would recommend to the Commission that children be represented by counsel in neglect and abuse cases. Children deserve to have their positions represented and advocated for before the court. While in Massachusetts GALs are often appointed in cases to make recommendations to the court as to what is in the best interests of the children, it is not sufficient, in my experience, to have only GALs assigned to cases and not counsel to represent children.

I would also recommend that the Juvenile sessions of the NH courts hold evening sessions. I frequently represent parents who are working, but are nonetheless indigent. Often these parents must miss work in order to attend court. When in trial, with frequent and lengthy court hearings, it is a major sacrifice for a parent to repeatedly give up their income so that they can attend court.

Finally, I would recommend that the Juvenile sessions of the NH courts hold sessions daily so that parents who are working part time on a fixed schedule can pick a day for a hearing which does not conflict with their work schedule. It is my experience that a parent will often say to me that s/he can only attend court on a Monday or Tuesday because they work on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and I have to explain to my client that the Juvenile Court only hold care and protection sessions on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Again, it is it is a major sacrifice for a parent to give up their income so that they can attend court during proceedings which can extend over the course of a year.

I hope that my experience and my suggestions are helpful to your deliberations and the recommendations you make. Thank you for offering me the opportunity to participate in your work. I appreciate it. Please contact me if you need any clarification or additional information regarding my suggestions.

Very truly yours,

(Ms.) Zoe R. Manos