

Trial Court Budget Commission
Conference Call Minutes
May 30, 2003



The following members attended the conference call: Mike Bridenback, Judge Bryan, Ruben Carrerou, Judge Farina, Judge Francis, Judge Hammond, Judge Laurent, Judge Moran, Judge Morris, Carol Ortman, Wayne Peacock, Judge Perez, Judge Perry, Judge Pittman, Judge Reese, Judge Roby, Judge Schaeffer, Walt Smith, and Theresa Westerfield. OSCA staff present were: Pat Badland, Dorothy Burke, Lisa Goodner, Peggy Horvath, Charlotte Jerrett, Rob Lubitz, and Jo Suhr.

Judge Schaeffer opened the meeting at 12:15 p.m. by calling roll. She confirmed that all members received the meeting materials. The following agenda items were reviewed:

Update on Conference Report on FY 2003-2004 Appropriations Act

Judge Schaeffer reviewed the report, summarizing the cuts for each budget entity of the State Courts System. The TCBC Executive Committee discussed alternative plans during the legislative session and special session, but agreed to follow the original TCBC plan, which was to select programs for reduction affecting the least number of circuits.

All entities show significant reductions, except the DCA's. They originally slated the trial courts for fifty-seven (57) deputy court administrator reductions and that they reduced number to thirteen (13). OSCA lost the most in proportion, with thirteen (13) positions or more than 10% of staff.

The judicial assistant pay equity adjustments surprised the TCBC delegation during the legislative session. The group met with Representative Negron who stated the judicial assistants were not up to the state average and he considered it a priority for funding.

Judge Schaeffer noted that the reversions on the final conference report actually have been experienced in the past and should not cause major problems.

Discussion of Trial Court Budget Reductions and Position Cuts

A. General Revenue Reductions

Judge Schaeffer reviewed the ten page report entitled State Funded Trial Court Programs and Services. The report lists the local programs eliminated by the legislature. Legislators did not want the Foster Care Citizen Review cut.

Judge Schaeffer thanked the judges who offered up their programs. Judge Farina stated the program cuts in the 11th circuit will result in layoffs for eleven (11) full-time and nine (9) part-time staff. Judge Schaeffer added that all program cuts helped reduce the number of deputy court administrator cuts.

The general revenue budget reductions proposed by the TCBC Executive Committee were reviewed. The recommendations were based on the following:

1. All circuits lose Alternative Sanctions Coordinator position, pursuant to Legislative direction.
2. Six circuits lose miscellaneous programs and services cuts, pursuant to Legislative direction.
3. Five circuits lose Model Dependency Court programs, pursuant to Legislative direction.
4. Remaining deputy court administrator cuts to be allocated among circuits not affected by criteria 2 and 3 above.

Page 7 of the report shows the ratio of staff to judges after implementation of the cuts.

B. Family Court Trust Fund Reductions

Judge Schaeffer reviewed the Revenue and Expenditure Analysis and stated there might be more cuts from the trust funds and therefore should not be considered as the general revenue reductions are considered.

Judge Schaeffer called for a vote to approve the general revenue reductions proposed by the TCBC Executive Committee for FY 2003-04. Seventeen (17) members present voted in favor of the recommendation and two (2) against. Two (2) members were not present. Several members expressed concern regarding the Family Court Trust Fund and the impact of the cuts on small circuits.

Time Line for Development of the 2004-05 Trial Court Legislative Budget Request

Lisa Goodner asked members to note that a TCBC meeting is scheduled for August 5, 2003, to take testimony on and approve the budget request for FY 2004/05.

Other Business

Judge Morris asked about the status of the hiring freeze. His circuit has 3.5 frozen positions. Lisa Goodner explained that an analysis, taking into consideration the budget reductions, has not been completed. We will discuss this item at the next regular meeting in June.

Judge Hammond asked if the priority of the position will be considered when reviewing the status of the hiring freeze. A staff attorney is needed now. Ms. Goodner will provide a vacancy list at the June meeting.

Ms. Goodner recommends leaving the hiring freeze in place. Many positions are GAL and she recommends leaving those positions vacant due to the transition taking place. Also suggested is that the freeze be lifted so that employees affected by the cuts could be considered for the vacancies. The members agreed that the hiring freeze should be lifted for employees affected by the cuts.

Judge Pittman asked if a position were cut, can we work with the dollars, transfer, and keep the salary? Ms. Goodner replied we could cut those positions in Court Administration other than Deputy Court Administrators.

Judge Schaeffer stated if additional clarification or assistance is needed, to please contact Lisa Goodner individually.

Adjournment

With no other business before the Trial Court Budget Commission, Judge Schaeffer adjourned the meeting at 1:48 p.m.