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THE ALLIANCE
for Equal Justice

SUPPORTER

February 18, 2015

Honorable Ann Schindler
Court of Appeals, Division I
600 University Street
One Union Square
Seattle, WA 98101-1176

Dear Judge Schindler:

RE: WSCCR Research Proposal – Plain Language Family Law Forms Impact

This summer, the Administrative Office of the Courts will release plain language family law mandatory forms. The project marks the achievement of one of the important goals laid out in "The Washington State Plan for Integrated Pro Se Assistance Services," released June 30, 2010. The plain language forms project has been the culmination of countless hours devoted by judges (led by Judge Laura Gene Middaugh), courthouse facilitators, clerks, attorneys, members of the public, and AOC staff. The Washington State Supreme Court lent its support for the project in January 2013.

The plain language forms project follows the spirit of the Plain Writing Act of 2010, federal legislation signed by President Obama on October 13, 2010. That law requires federal agencies to use "clear Government communication that the public can understand and use." Those of us deeply involved in the project believe we have moved Washington State closer to that goal. However, as with any large-scope project, an evaluation of its impact and success is appropriate. To that end, we are writing on behalf of the Access to Justice Board's Justice Without Barriers Committee, under whose guise this project falls, to request that the Washington State Center for Court Research conduct an evaluation of the plain language family law forms.

We envision the scope of the evaluation to be a comparison of case processing events and outcomes for those cases that used the "legalese" forms and those that used the plain language forms. Those events and outcomes might include:

- Number of hearings required to finalize a dissolution of marriage case for self-represented litigants
- Comparison of time to resolution for cases that used the old forms and those that used the plain language forms
- Comparison of number of hearings required to finalize dissolution of marriage cases involving self-represented parties before and after implementation of the plain language forms
- Quantitative input from litigants as to the usability of the plain language forms

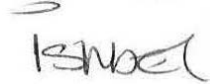
The primary beneficiary of plain language forms is the party involved in a family law case. Upwards of 70% of family law cases have at least one self-

represented party, and many of those cases see neither party represented by legal counsel. Even for those parties who do have attorneys, benefits are hoped to accrue to them as well, by having forms and orders in plain language, easier to comprehend than those in what has come to be called "legalese." An evaluation will help pinpoint these benefits. Additionally, the evaluation will help inform future work as other forms are converted to plain language.

Please feel free to contact me or Ms. Lynn Greiner, chair of the Pro Se Project subcommittee of Justice Without Barriers, at 206-838-3320 or lgreiner@seanet.com to further discuss this proposal.

Thank you for your attention.

Very truly yours,



Ishbel Dickens, Chair
Access to Justice Board

cc: Justice Without Barriers Committee Members
Honorable Laura Gene Middaugh
Merrie Gough