

Dear Chief Justice Boatright and SCA Vasconcellos;

During the public testimony phase of the Interim Committee on Judicial Discipline hearings on June 14 and July 12, the committee heard from multiple witnesses expressing anger, frustration and indignation at their treatment in probate/conservatorship/elder law and family law proceedings. Litigant/witnesses described unconscionable delays in rulings, estates being depleted of millions of dollars, disregarding requests by family members to provide for protected persons, unresponsiveness of courts to pleadings, deprivations of parental rights, including ongoing denial of contact with children, claims of apparent conspiracies between lawyers, judges and conservators, and many other abuses.

We obviously could not assess the veracity of the testimony, nor did we engage with the witnesses other than to inform them that such issues were beyond the scope of the Committee's mission. As you would expect that response was wholly unsatisfactory.

We are bringing these issues to your attention as leaders of the Judicial Branch. This is not the first time we have heard them and some of us receive periodic emails with similar complaints. We don't know if there is a systemic problem, but we believe it is inappropriate to leave these serious allegations unaddressed. Thus, we are making you aware of the complaints. Ms. Juliann Jensen, LCS staff person for the Interim Committee, can assist you in identifying the disgruntled witnesses if you desire to contact them.

In that regard, we understand that OARC is revisiting the idea of family court paraprofessionals to guide pro se litigants who express a lot of dissatisfaction. There have also been suggestions of implementing family court surveys, akin to exit interviews, to obtain actionable data. Some have suggested consideration of a Court Ombudsman.

We take no position on the complaints or solutions. Our sole purpose as leaders of the Interim Committee is to make you, the leaders of the Judicial Department, aware of serious allegations and dissatisfaction expressed by witnesses so you can take whatever action you deem appropriate.

Respectfully submitted;

Pete Lee, Chair, Interim Committee Terri Carver, Vice Chair, Interim Committee