

Notice of Proposed Change to Consent Decree

Are you incarcerated at York Correctional Institution, or a child or youth whose mother is or may be incarcerated at York Correctional Institution? If so, you should read this notice. It gives you information about a change to conditions at York Correctional Institution, regarding family law assistance.

Background

In 1983, a lawsuit called *West v. Manson* was filed in federal court on behalf of women held at CCI Niantic (CCIN) and their children. It claimed that the conditions at CCIN violated the rights of the women and their children. In 1988, the lawsuit was settled. The Department of Correction (DOC) agreed to give York inmates a lawyer to help them with civil family matters. Recently, a male inmate challenged DOC's policy of not giving similar legal help to male inmates. DOC decided it must treat men and women equally, but could not afford to provide legal help to *all* inmates. So, DOC asked the court to stop making it give lawyers to women at York.

The law on Consent Judgments has changed a lot since the court first approved *West v. Manson*. In the 1990's, Congress passed a law making it easier for the state to end court orders affecting prison life. That is the law that the DOC is using to stop giving lawyers to York inmates. The lawyers representing York inmates and their kids have bargained with DOC to keep some legal assistance in place. Those lawyers, and the DOC, now recommend approval of a separate agreement to maintain some access to legal information. The agreement will *not* provide a lawyer to represent individual inmates in court in civil legal matters. Instead, if the agreement is approved, attorneys will provide workshops and training on family law matters. Without this Agreement, there is a risk that the *West v. Manson* consent decree requiring provision of a family law attorney at York could be terminated, without any replacement legal information regarding family law matters.

Proposed Changes

You can see the entire changes ("Settlement") at the office of Greater Hartford Legal Aid, 999 Asylum Ave., 3rd Floor, Hartford. It will also be posted on the website for Greater Hartford Legal Aid (www.ghla.org) and on the web site of the Department of Correction (www.ct.gov/doc). You can also call or write the lawyers who represent the Plaintiffs if you would like a copy of the settlement. Their contact information is at the bottom. These things would happen as part of the settlement:

1. **Family law seminars:** DOC will arrange for an attorney or paralegal to teach seminars to increase inmates' knowledge of legal proceedings. These seminars

will teach about things such as child custody and visitation, and divorce when child custody is contested. Each facility will get at least one seminar a year.

2. **Self-help information:** CTLawHelp will give DOC a digital copy of its legal self-help pamphlets and forms. DOC will make this material available by loading it onto inmate computers in DOC facilities. These materials cover subjects including family matters, such as divorce, custody, and visitation.
3. **Copies of self-help pamphlets:** Inmates may write DOC's contract attorneys for paper copies of CTLawHelp's self-help pamphlets regarding family matters, such as divorce, custody, and visitation.
4. **How Long the Agreement Lasts:** The parts of the Settlement Agreement regarding the family law seminars and provision of paper copies of the self-help pamphlets will be in effect as long as DOC contracts for legal services to inmates. If DOC does not have the budget for legal services, it will notify the attorneys for the inmate mothers and children and we will try to work out a solution. The part of the Settlement Agreement about the electronic copies of CTLawHelp materials will last as long as DOC has inmate computers or comparable technology.

Right to Object

Any person at York, or her child, has the right to let the Court, the attorneys, and/or DOC know if they object to the proposed settlement agreement. The Court has set a hearing on **August 2, 2017, at 10:00 AM** at the federal courthouse in Bridgeport at the address below. Incarcerated members of the plaintiff class can participate in the hearing by video if they write to the court by **July 26, 2017**, at the address below.

You may also object to the settlement by writing a letter which must be postmarked by **July 26, 2017**, to the Court at this address:

The Honorable Magistrate Judge Holly B. Fitzsimmons
U.S. District Court
District of Connecticut
Brien McMahon Federal Building
Courtroom 4
915 Lafayette Blvd., Bridgeport, CT 06604

Please send a copy to the Plaintiffs' counsel (address below).

You may also call or write the following attorneys, who have represented the Plaintiffs in this lawsuit, if you have any questions:

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