

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATE COURTS INITIATIVE

JANUARY 2016
NEWSLETTER TO THE ADVISORY BOARD

Working Towards an Engagement Strategy Update on Activities since Initiative Kick-off

As you are aware, the inaugural meeting of the Advisory Board was held on October 16, 2015, in Washington DC. Advisory Board members present and several participating by phone convened for a thought provoking meeting, which primarily focused on building an engagement strategy and the continual goal of outreach with presentations by Dr. Joseph Hamm, Associate Dean Jonathan Smith, and David Rottman. To review the minutes of the meeting and access other documents related to this initiative, visit our **Dropbox** account (the direct link has been emailed to you), which we have set up for the Board's convenience. Since the Advisory Board meeting, we have been working on next steps and outreach on a number of levels which are summarized below in this newsletter.

Mission Statement

Immediately following the meeting, as an essential preliminary action, the Advisory Board and Staff worked to refine its mission statement. The Board approved a final statement which will be vital in guiding the Board's efforts in this initiative.

Survey

As we continued to work on refining our engagement strategy work plan, as an initial data-gathering step, NCSC conducted a comprehensive public opinion survey to closely examine persistent concerns involving bias, inefficiency, and customer service that are undermining the public's confidence in the courts. The survey, which was administered by GBA Strategies, was conducted by telephone of 1,000 registered voters between October 26-29, 2015. The poll was administered to an oversample of 200 African Americans over the same period.

The survey revealed that there is a disturbingly pervasive belief that the justice system is unequal and systemically produces different results based on race,

income, and other socio-economic factors. The survey also found that confidence in the court system varies greatly based on those factors. Most strikingly, there is a massive racial gap on most measures, including bias, equal justice, and customer service, with African Americans much more distrustful of the courts and the broader justice system. For more information on the survey findings visit, <http://www.ncsc.org/2015survey> or Dropbox.

Roundtable Discussion

A Roundtable Discussion on Racial Equity and the Role of Local Governments was held on October 14, 2015 at Georgetown University, McDonough School of Business, with Chief Judge Washington in attendance. Among others, Julie Nelson, Director of Government Alliance on Race and Equity, Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California-Berkeley presented on the responsibility and opportunity for local governments to advance racial equity in partnerships with the community. For agenda and presentations, visit our Dropbox account.

National Symposium in Washington, DC

On December 4, 2015, Chief Judge Washington spoke at a National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement and the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law. He informed attendees of the importance of the Community Engagement in the State Courts Initiative. Associate Dean Jonathan Smith, the Reporter to the Advisory Board, is involved with the work of this group and invited Chief Judge Washington to present. His keynote speech was an opportunity to test out our outreach message and was very well-received.

Dear Advisory Board Members,
In an attempt to keep our members abreast of relevant events, activities, and next steps related to the work of the Advisory Board, we are sending you this newsletter which we hope you will find informative.

It is an honor and a privilege to be working with you on an issue so critical to our state courts. I appreciate your taking the time to attend our inaugural meeting on October 16th in Washington DC. I was impressed with the level of commitment and enthusiasm that each of you brought to the table. After seeing this group work together, I know that with your help, we will successfully develop tools that can be utilized by state courts nationally to more effectively engage with communities of color to increase the trust and confidence those communities have in the ability of courts to resolve their disputes peacefully while protecting individual rights and freedoms. I would like to thank Jonathan Mattiello for attending our meeting. Without the generous support of the State Justice Institute, our work would not be possible.

I strongly encourage you to let us know when you learn of issues that have not yet received national press but are important because they undermine the trust and confidence in our courts. Also, please contact Tina Vagenas at kvagenas@ncsc.org to let her know of any upcoming events your organizations are planning that might be appropriate for a presentation or engagement opportunity with our Advisory Board.

Sincerely,
Eric T. Washington
Chair

Mission Statement

The mission of the Community Engagement in the State Courts' Advisory Board is:

To develop effective tools and resources that assist state court leaders in engaging marginalized and disenfranchised communities to ensure equal access to justice for all, and to improve the trust and confidence those communities have in state courts to protect their individual rights and liberties and resolve disputes fairly.

National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices

The Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) have formed a National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices to address the ongoing impact of court fines and fees and pretrial bail/bonds on communities across the United States.

The Task Force will be comprised of national judicial and legal leaders, legal advocates, policy makers from state, county and municipal government, academics, and the public interest community. It will be co-chaired by Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor and Kentucky State Court Administrator Laurie K. Dudgeon. The Task Force will coordinate with other key stakeholders, including the Department of Justice and the State Justice Institute.

The co-chairs are in the process of forming three working groups:

- Access to Justice and Fairness;
- Transparency, Governance & Structural Reform; and
- Accountability, Judicial Performance and Qualifications, and Oversight.

We will keep you posted on the work of this Task Force.



Next Steps: The Listening Tour

We continue to explore and develop the engagement strategy work plan relating to the "Listening Tour." Thank you to those who have sent us comments and suggestions. Please continue to send them along. We have further refined what we previously sent you and are excited to present to you for your consideration the following work plan. We will be polling you shortly to set the next Advisory Board Conference call to discuss this plan.

National Town Hall

We would enlist 5 to 7 jurisdictions to participate in a virtual (videoconference) national town hall. Each participating jurisdiction would have a facilitator. The goal would be to provide a national forum to identify problem areas and to explore ways in which the courts can engage to address those problems and improve public trust and confidence in the courts. The NCSC public opinion survey would serve as a conversation starter. We would also ask the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts for assistance in identifying the top 3 discussion issues, keeping in mind that each jurisdiction's problem identification will differ.

The Town Hall may then be structured in the following order:

(1) Conduct 3 different larger plenaries during the Town Hall to frame the issue;

(2) All jurisdictions/sites would engage in these plenaries;

(3) Sites phase out into smaller focus group "break out" sessions to discuss and flush out issues. Each then returns to the larger group format to be led in a "talk show" format which could be a more interactive way of conveying the reporting from the break-out sessions.

After we host the National Town Hall, we hope to engage in a broadcast, where we would address our issues on a national platform. We currently are identifying possible opportunities.

State Pilots

Select at least 4 state pilot sites to test a range of minority community engagement strategies, such as living room conversations, twitter town halls, youth conferences, etc., which will be based on the issues identified during the listening tour and designed to improve public trust and confidence in the courts.

Panel Presentation

In addition to these activities, we have been invited to conduct a session at the **Loyola Law School for Journalists on June 10, 2016**. Our session would focus on reporting on the National Town Hall and our work in community engagement.

Advisory Board Members

Chair: Hon. Eric T. Washington
Chief Judge, D.C. Court of Appeals

Rev. Aundreia Alexander
National Council of Churches

Hon. Anna Blackburne-Rigsby
D.C. Court of Appeals

Cornell W. Brooks
President and CEO, NAACP

Paulette Brown
President, American Bar Association

Hon. Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of California

Hon. Edward C. Clifton (Ret.)
Superior Court of Rhode Island

Hon. Jimmie M. Edwards
Circuit Judge, 22nd Judicial Circuit
St. Louis, Missouri

Jennifer Farmer
Managing Director of Communications
for the Advancement Project

Ivan K. Fong
Senior Vice President and General Counsel
3M Company

Beatrice Garza
President and CEO of the Association for
Advancement of Mexican Americans

Loretta Johnson
Secretary-Treasurer, American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

Hon. Jonathan Lippman
Chief Judge, New York Court of Appeals

Mary McQueen
President, National Center for State Courts

Hon. Eduardo Padro
New York Supreme Court

Rev. Rob Schenck
Faith and Action

Tavis Smiley
Broadcaster, Executive Producer and
CEO, The Smiley Group, Inc.

Reporter
Associate Dean Jonathan Smith
UDC David A. Clarke School of Law

Staff Project Director
Tina Vagenas
Director Access to Justice, NCSC

A Project of:

- **State Justice Institute**
- **Conference of Chief Justices**
- **National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts**
- **National Center for State Courts**