



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATE COURTS INITIATIVE

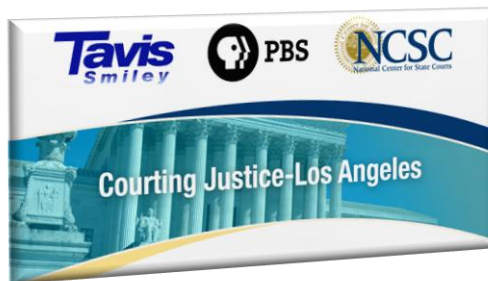
ADVISORY BOARD NEWSLETTER

July 2016 Issue 2

### Courting Justice

#### Embarking on an Unprecedented Listening Tour

We are delighted to announce the successful launch of our unprecedented Listening Tour. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the first episode of **Courting Justice** was broadcast on PBS stations across the country. **Courting Justice** is a multi-part televised Listening Tour being produced in cooperation with Tavis Smiley, PBS broadcaster and Advisory Board member.



The series will be traveling to five cities across the country, offering stakeholders from disenfranchised communities both an opportunity to discuss the issues that continue to erode the public trust in our justice system and a chance to help craft concrete reforms. In each city, Tavis Smiley will facilitate an hour-long dialogue during which the audience is encouraged to speak frankly about how they would reform our court system.

Panelists will include state supreme and appellate court judges and national advocates for judicial reform. The curated audience will be comprised of members of the community, litigants, community

activists, law enforcement, trial court judges, public defenders, and prosecutors.

The inaugural conversation was held in Los Angeles on June 10<sup>th</sup>, at Loyola Law School. Audience members were drawn from Los Angeles area social justice, advocacy, faith and small business communities, in addition to local and national court and bar leaders. Panelists included judicial leaders: Judge Daniel J. Buckley, Los Angeles Superior Court; Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, California Supreme Court; Judge Jimmie Edwards, 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit, St. Louis, MO; Judge Maria P. Rivera, CA First District Court of Appeals; and Chief Judge Eric T. Washington, D.C. Court of Appeals.

"I am gratified that many of the most influential judges in the country are eager to step down from the bench and engage in a free and open exchange with the people most affected by their decisions," Tavis Smiley commented. "This frank discussion is unprecedented. Securing the public's trust in our judicial system is fundamental to our democracy."

Support for **Courting Justice** is provided by the State Justice Institute, the National Center for State Courts, the California Endowment, and the Public Welfare Foundation. The first edition of **Courting Justice** was broadcast on *Tavis Smiley* on PBS and *The Tavis Smiley Show* on Public Radio International.



### Message from the Chair

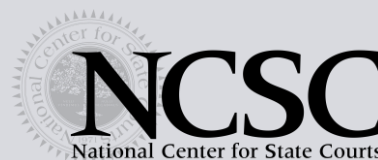
When we set out on this initiative, we could only imagine the impact of the Advisory Board's efforts. By televising the Listening Tour, we are taking these issues to a new level. In order to be fair and impartial, judges must be equal opportunity listeners. While we are used to listening to the concerns of the litigants who appear in our courtrooms, our focus on resolving individual cases has in many ways kept us from seeing the forest for the trees. As a result, surveys show that there has been an erosion of trust between the courts and the communities we serve, especially communities of color. This multi-city town hall series is allowing us to listen to new perspectives on how courts can better deliver justice for all.

I wish to thank the members of the Advisory Board for their innovative thinking which brought us to this pivotal moment at which we are providing a national platform for the most critical issues currently confronting our country. We extend our deepest gratitude to Advisory Board member, Tavis Smiley, for helping us believe we could do this and for making it happen.

Further, thank you to the panelists who have participated, thus far, in the Listening Tour, the members of the Advisory Board, the State Justice Institute, and the NCSC staff for their time, effort, and commitment.

Please contact Tina Vagenas at [kvagenas@ncsc.org](mailto:kvagenas@ncsc.org) or 703-841-5618 with any questions or to inform her 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



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



## Across the County...We are Listening

### *The Listening Tour in Full Force*

The first half of 2016 has been filled with a considerable amount of activity. The Community Engagement in the State Courts Initiative Advisory Board (Advisory Board) and members of the judiciary have been engaging with and listening to the public in events across the nation in an effort to find ways to increase trust and confidence in the courts. In addition to the ***Courting Justice*** broadcast, the following events have occurred:

#### ***The Conversation about 'The Conversation' about Race, Delaware***

On March 24<sup>th</sup> the Delaware Historical Society's Contemporary History Series, presented *The Conversation about 'The Conversation' about Race*. The event explored how the community can have a direct and respectful discussion about the intersection of race and public policy. The conversation was structured in four parts: 1) What should we be talking about? 2) What is stopping us? 3) What must we do to make progress? and 4) Where do we go from here?

Chief Justice Leo E. Strine Jr., who was one of the panelists, stated that people of good faith talking candidly and directly about race is "a critical factor that will determine whether our society can make progress in increasing racial harmony and decreasing racial inequality." An abbreviated video of the event has been created and is available upon request.

#### ***The 30<sup>th</sup> Annual National Council on Educating Black Children, Baltimore MD***

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, Advisory Board members were invited to make a presentation at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual National Council on Educating Black Children. The presenters were Chief Judge Washington, Dr. Lorretta Johnson, and Judge Edwards.

Chief Judge Washington opened the panel with an overview of the initiative's mission and work plan. This was followed by Judge Edwards's comprehensive presentation of key findings from the 2015 NCSC Public Opinion Survey, which revealed a pervasive distrust of courts among African Americans. The presenters then turned the focus to the audience and assumed the listening role by posing the following question to the audience, "What do you suggest the courts do to

restore confidence and trust?" Emerging from the audience engagement were four main answers/themes: 1) Increase judges' involvement in the community; 2) Educate schools and communities about the courts; and 3) Conduct/implement racial sensitivity training for judges and law enforcement.

#### ***National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts Conference, Williamsburg, VA***

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, Advisory Board members provided an update on their work to the entire National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts during its general session.



Board members on the panel were Chief Judge Washington, Rev. Aundrea Alexander, Judge Edward C. Clifton, Judge Edwards, Jennifer Farmer, Dr. Lorretta Johnson, Judge Eduardo Padro, and Rev. Rob Schenck. Tavis Smiley, speaking remotely via Skype, reported on progress with the ***Courting Justice*** television series.

Also at the conference was a Town Hall Meeting, titled *Community Engagement: Building Trust in the Criminal Justice System*, with legendary talk show host Joe Madison moderating, along with Judge Edwards as one of the panelists.

In addition, the Advisory Board members who were present for the conference participated in a business meeting.

#### ***Events Happening Now:***

**- NACM, Pittsburgh, PA, July 11.**  
*Judge Edwards and Paulette Brown presenting to NACM members at the general session about the Listening Tour, community engagement, and implicit bias.*

**- National Bar Association Annual Meeting, St. Louis, MO, July 18.**  
*Advisory Board members, Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, Judge Edwards, and Jennifer Farmer presenting on the crisis in confidence, exploring the relationship between the minority community and the justice system.*

## Advisory Board Members

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

**Rev. Aundrea 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, 22<sup>nd</sup> 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

**Dr. Lorretta 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/Special Adviser**  
**Associate Dean Jonathan Smith**

**Research Advisor**  
**Joe Hamm**

**Staff Project Director**  
**Tina Vagenas**  
Director, Access to Justice Initiatives, NCSC

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