We are delighted to announce the successful launch of our unprecedented Listening Tour. On June 22nd, 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 10th, 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, 22nd 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.
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 24th 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 30th Annual National Council on Educating Black Children, Baltimore MD

On April 22nd, Advisory Board members were invited to make a presentation at the 30th 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 27th, 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. Aundreia 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.

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