

Themes from Massachusetts Trial Court Listening Sessions

- Appreciation for open dialogue
 - Participants applauded the commitment of leadership to discuss race and bias in the courts
 - Participants expressed concerns about the lack of opportunities for regular dialogue
 - Participants were interested in follow up sessions
- Perceptions of bias in the court
 - Personnel were split on whether racial bias was an issue in the court
- The importance for diversity
 - Participants expressed the need to diversify the staff who interact regularly with the public as well as leadership
 - Pressing need for racial diversity and people who can speak the language of the community
- How stereotypes and biases affect court interactions (internal and external)
 - Examples were described of offensive and disparaging language based on race, nationality, language ability, and gender by coworkers
 - Lack of familiarity/understanding of people from different backgrounds affects interactions with court users at the counter
- Concern was expressed about the fairness of the hiring and promotion process
 - Recurring perception that politics or social relationships played more of a role than experience and fit for the role
 - Several employees even said they “knew who got the job before it was posted”
 - Comments underscored the need for more people of color in supervisory positions and leadership roles
 - “The trial court is not diverse, so people are afraid to touch it”
- Cross-Departmental relationships
 - Many people indicated that they do not meet regularly with their management or with peers
 - No way to bring concerns to the attention of leadership without filing a complaint
 - People expressed fear and unwillingness to speak directly with a person whose behavior poses an issue due to concern about retaliation or consequences for advancement
 - Lack of communication across departments
 - Lack of opportunities for regular interaction