



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATE COURTS INITIATIVE

ADVISORY BOARD NEWSLETTER

January 2017 Issue 3

As The Listening Tour Moves Across the Country We Listen...We Learn

After six months, the Community Engagement in the State Courts Initiative's Listening Tour, ***Courting Justice***, has completed three successful town halls that have been televised on PBS stations across the country. The series has included stops in Los Angeles, Little Rock, and Cleveland.



In each city, Tavis Smiley (PBS broadcaster and Advisory Board member) has facilitated an interactive dialogue where constituents have had an opportunity to voice their concerns and share real world solutions on rebuilding the public trust in our judiciary and crafting concrete reforms.

Following the kick-off town hall in **Los Angeles, California** on June 10, 2016, the second of the series was held in **Little Rock, Arkansas** on September 23, 2016. The panelists included: Chief Justice John Dan Kemp; Circuit Judge Wiley A. Branton, Jr.; Circuit Judge Carlton D. Jones; and District Judge Kim Bridgforth. Two half-hour segments were aired on September 28th and 29th on Tavis Smiley's regular nightly PBS programming slot. The third town hall was held in **Cleveland, Ohio** on

December 8, 2016 and broadcast on December 13th and 14th on PBS. The panelists included: Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio Maureen O'Connor; Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Ronald B. Adrine; Lakewood Municipal Court Judge Patrick Carroll; and Former Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio and Partner at Jones Day Yvette McGee Brown.

Each of the forums featured a panel of judges and a studio audience of active questioners. The audience included community members, litigants, community activists, law enforcement, trial court judges, public defenders, and prosecutors.



The Listening Tour is being produced in cooperation with Tavis Smiley. It is an effort of the Community Engagement in the State Courts Initiative, which is a joint project of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ), the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), the State Justice Institute (SJI), and the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness (NCREF). For episodes, visit NCSC.org/Conferences-and-Events/Courting-Justice.aspx



Public Opinion Survey

In November 2016, NCSC conducted its annual national survey of registered voters regarding their perception of state courts. The survey questions covered a range of issues including public trust in the court system, a general understanding of court funding, and fines and fees.

One of the findings of the survey revealed an improvement of the public's trust in the state court system. Nearly four in five Americans who report direct interaction with the courts expressed satisfaction in procedural fairness. However, those surveyed tended to believe that a judge's ethnicity influences fairness in the court system. The poll also revealed that there is strong public support for reform on issues related to court fines and fees and considerable opposition to incarcerating defendants that are too poor to pay. For complete survey results, visit NCSC.org/2016survey

Board Business Meeting

The Advisory Board on Community Engagement in the State Courts (Advisory Board) convened a business meeting in December in conjunction with the Cleveland Courting Justice recording. The agenda included a discussion of next steps in the Listening Tour and transitioning to the problem-identification phase of the initiative. The crux of the latter will be a validation survey in which survey recipients will be asked to rank order the importance of 8-10 problems identified through the "Courting Justice" broadcasts. The Advisory Board was also



Advisory Board Business Meeting December 8, 2016 * Cleveland, Ohio

pleased to welcome to the meeting and to its initiative the assistance of Dr. Alan Tomkins, the Deputy Division Director of the National Science Foundation.

Beyond the Bench: Law, Justice, and Communities Summit

The Beyond the Bench: Law, Justice, and Communities Summit was held on December 14, 2016 in Dallas, Texas. The Summit brought together Texas judges, law-enforcement officers, activists, and other community leaders to confront simmering civil strife and its effect on Texas courts. The event opened with remarks by Chief Justice Nathan Hecht; host Paul Quinn; President Michael Sorrell; Court of Criminal Appeals Presiding Judge Sharon Keller; and Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman, the conference's chief organizer.



Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo headlined the Summit, sponsored by the two highest Texas courts, to foster racial understanding and trust in the judicial system in the wake of police shootings and ambushes on officers. Acevedo has led the department through community crises after several shootings during his tenure involving both police officers killed on duty and police officers who shot unarmed suspects. Following Acevedo's remarks, D.C. Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric Washington guided a series of firsthand accounts by people who experienced life-altering moments with police, including being wrongfully incarcerated or losing a loved one in a violent confrontation.

The Summit featured a presentation by Dr. Jeffrey Rachlinski, a Cornell Law School professor whose research specialty in cognitive and social psychology has focused on unconscious bias in judicial decision-making. The day of listening and learning ended with each participant identifying one big idea to help move the needle on restoring trust in the justice system and a call to action to continue the conversation well beyond the Summit. A Toolkit with details about the event will be released on January 30, 2017. After the release, links to the Toolkit will be available on the Supreme Court of Texas website, www.txcourts.gov/

Update on Issues and Events

Fines and Fees

The National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices met on November 15, 2016 in Arlington Virginia. The focus of the meeting was a review of the National Task Force's near term deliverables, draft Principles, and potential pilots. Next steps include development of the *Best Practices Guide for Determining the Right to Counsel in Legal Financial Obligation Cases*, a Hackathon in April, and continued work on a number of long term deliverables. The near term deliverables will be released shortly, along with the launch of the newly-created website.

National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts

On November 11, 2016, NCREFC held its Board Retreat. At the reception, Tina Vagenas, Director of Access to Justice Initiatives, NCSC, provided an update on the work of the Advisory Board to the Consortium. Ms. Vagenas detailed how the effort is working to develop tools for courts to engage with minority and disadvantaged communities, ensure equal

access to justice, and build public trust and confidence in the judiciary.

National Association for Court Management, Portland, OR

On February 6, 2017, members of the Advisory Board and the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts will speak to NACM members about the goals of this important initiative and provide an update on the work that is underway on the listening phase of the initiative, including the televised "Courting Justice" series.

An introduction will be given by Vicky Carlson, NACM President-Elect. Speakers include: James D. Gingerich, Director, Administrative Office of the Courts, Little Rock, AR; Hon. Jimmie Edwards, Circuit Judge, 22nd Judicial Circuit, St. Louis, MO; Rev. Aundrea Alexander, Esq., Associate General Secretary for Justice and Peace, National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, Washington, DC; and Hon. Ronald B. Adrine, Presiding Judge, Cleveland Municipal Court, Cleveland, OH.

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, 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

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.

Jonathan Smith
Reporter/Special Adviser

Joe Hamm
Research Advisor

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

For Information contact: Tina Vagenas at
Kvagenas@ncsc.org or 703-841-5618

