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The Nebraska Minority Justice Committee Progress Report 2006

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THE NEBRASKA MINORITY JUSTICE COMMITTEE

PROGRESS REPORT 2006

— *EQUAL JUSTICE BEFORE THE COURTS* —



History and Mission



Chairs and staff of the MJC: *Sitting:* Hon. John Gerrard, Nebraska Supreme Court and Co-Chair of the MJC. *Standing, from left to right:* Jane Schoenike, Executive Director of the Nebraska State Bar Association; Liz Neeley, PhD, Project Director of the MJC and Linda Crump, Office of Equity Access and Diversity UNL, Co-Chair of the MJC.

The Nebraska Minority Justice Committee is a unique statewide collaboration that works to develop and implement just and sustainable policy reforms that will not only improve the system of justice but will also strengthen public trust and confidence in our laws and court system. The Committee is a joint effort of the Nebraska State Bar Association and the Nebraska Supreme Court, appointed by the Supreme Court in May of 2003 in response to a Task Force's two-year investigation of racial and ethnic bias and discrimination in Nebraska's justice system. The mission of the Committee is to achieve three primary aims:

- Address racial disparities in both the juvenile and adult justice systems
- Ensure equal access to justice
- Increase the diversity of Nebraska's judicial workforce and legal profession

The Committee is pleased to share these brief descriptions of the progress it made in 2006.

Access to Justice



Representative Juries Project

The MJC was awarded a \$30,000 grant from Woods Charitable Fund to develop, implement and evaluate a statewide educational campaign designed to thank jurors for their contribution to the justice system and to promote the representation of people from every ethnicity, race, religion and economic background on our juries. The campaign targeted Nebraska's most diverse counties and utilized a three-pronged campaign to promote jury service, consisting of meetings with minority community organizations, dissemination of written materials regarding the jury process, and a targeted radio campaign. The campaign visited: Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, Lexington, Madison and Scottsbluff counties. The final two campaign destinations, Lancaster and Douglas counties, added an additional component; "law day" events at local minority community centers featuring: a free legal clinic (sponsored by the Volunteer Lawyers Project), information about jury service and an opportunity to register to vote, information about applying to and attending law school, and information about careers in the court system.



Access to Justice Issue of *The Nebraska Lawyer*

In May of 2006 the Committee co-published a special issue on "Access to Justice" in *The Nebraska Lawyer*, educating attorneys on: immigration issues, working with non-English speaking populations, legal services for the poor, and other factors affecting the public's access to the justice system.

Nebraska Juror Qualification Form APPEN
County [addressed to]

All qualified citizens in Nebraska should have the opportunity to be considered for jury service and should like their obligation to serve as jurors when summoned. You are therefore required under penalty of law to question (unless otherwise indicated) and return this form properly signed, to the Jury Commissioner, with days.

ANY PERSON WHO KNOWINGLY FAILS TO COMPLETE AND RETURN OR WHO WILL MISREPRESENTS A MATERIAL FACT ON THIS FORM FOR THE PURPOSE OF AVOIDING OR SERVICE AS A JUROR SHALL BE GUILTY OF CONTEMPT OF COURT.

If you are unable to fill out this form, another person may complete it for you, and that person must sign it provide an explanation at the end of this document.

Name: Last First Middle
Address: City Zip Code
Telephone: Daytime Evening Cellular/Telephone (if information is already provided above and/or correct, please provide correct information.)

Part I JUROR REQUEST NOT TO SERVE. (If you meet the criteria for one of the following and excused from serving on that basis, you may skip parts IV and V; please complete Part VII and return the forms.) You will be notified if the court grants your request to be excused service.

I am 65 years of age or older do not wish to serve on a jury.

Uniform Juror Qualification Form

The MJC was responsible for developing Nebraska's uniform juror qualification form and obtaining legislative access to juror qualification forms for the purpose of research. The uniform juror qualification form will allow researchers to determine the extent to which the current juror compilation process systematically excludes racial and ethnic minorities.

Criminal and Juvenile Justice

Assigned Counsel Fee Study

At the request of the Supreme Court, the MJC undertook a statewide assessment of fee structures for assigned counsel in misdemeanor and felony cases. The results of their examination, coupled with existing national guidelines for indigent defense systems, are the basis for the Committee's recommendations regarding standards on the qualifications, compensation, training, caseloads and workloads for each type of indigent defense system in Nebraska.



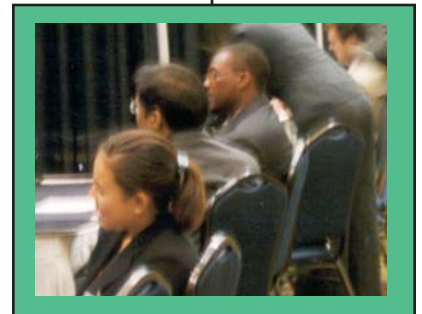
Improvement of Data Collection

The MJC developed an initiative to address the lack of data on race and ethnicity gathered by the court system, and is working for a uniform definition of race and ethnicity across justice system entities.

Diversity in the Profession and Court System

Second Annual Legal Diversity Summit

On October 6, 2006 the MJC hosted Nebraska's 2nd Annual Legal Diversity Summit. The Summit featured Harvard Law Professor, Charles Ogletree and provided informational interviews between regional law students of color and Nebraska legal employers. The Summit was well attended and successful in providing law students of color from the region with new knowledge, contacts and an interest in seeking employment in Nebraska after law school. The Summit also provided Nebraska's legal employers with new ways of understanding the value of a diverse workforce and strategies for recruiting and retaining attorneys of color.



Supporting Law School Initiatives

In 2006, the Minority Justice Committee once again supported the University of Nebraska College of Law Pre-Law Institute, a summer program which provides an introduction to legal study for students who are traditionally underrepresented in law school. The Committee also provided a minority law student scholarship to Creighton University School of Law.

Nebraska Legal Diversity Website

The popularity of the Nebraska Legal Diversity Website (www.nelegaldiversity.org) continues to grow. The website showcases the growing diversity of Nebraska while providing resources, discussion forums, tools for legal employers, and job postings from firms and organizations actively seeking minority applicants.

Barristers' Ball 2006



On May 20, 2006, the NSBA's Charitable Funds, Inc. hosted the Second Annual Barristers' Ball at the Doubletree Hotel in Omaha. The proceeds of the Ball were earmarked to support the projects of the Nebraska Minority Justice Committee. More specifically, the proceeds will support:

Diversity in the Profession—The expansion and continued operation of The Annual Nebraska Legal Diversity Summit and the establishment of minority law school scholarships to Nebraska Law Schools and for LSAT prep courses.

Removing Language Barriers—The continued translation of court and probation forms into a bilingual format to increase meaningful access to justice for limited- and non-English speakers.

Jury Research and Juror Education—Reform and education efforts to ensure that Nebraska's juries are representative of their communities.

Visionary Awards

In addition to a festive evening of dining, music and live and silent auctions, the Barristers' Ball presented numerous Visionary Awards in recognition of individuals' vision and commitment to promoting diversity in Nebraska's legal profession and improving the administration of justice. Award recipients included:

- The University of Nebraska College of Law Summer Pre-Law Institute
- The Bilingual Bail-Bond Rights Advisement Project
- The Original Chairs of the Minority and Justice Task Force
- The Founder of The American Indian Outreach Initiative
- The Original Founders of the Midlands Bar Association, and
- The Legislature's Judiciary Committee from 2003-2005

Priority Projects



The Minority Justice Committee recently underwent a strategic planning process to determine its future direction. Our priority projects for the coming years include:

- An initiative to provide uniform bilingual forms and documents to the court and probation systems
- Exploring policies to ensure that there are not barriers for non-English speakers and low income individuals from participating in diversion
- Improving access to legal services
- Developing a minority law school scholarship
- Partnering to establish mock trial programs in high schools with significant minority populations
- Providing model policies to law firms on: hiring, assignment of work, promotion, and evaluation of employees
- Introducing policies aimed at reducing disproportionate minority detention
- Working towards the adoption of a uniform definition of race and ethnicity across justice system entities
- Establishing a non-monetary system of bond

Raising Awareness

The Committee hopes that continual media coverage and community outreach will bring broad public exposure to these important issues. Members of the MJC have met with and made presentations to numerous groups in 2006 including: University of Nebraska College of Law, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Bias in the Courts, Nebraska’s Clerks of the District Court, the Nebraska Association of County Officials, and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. The MJC has also reached out to the community through the media via radio interviews, newspaper articles, and magazines and journals for a complete list of publications visit:

www.nebar.com/publicinfo/minority_justice.htm



Feedback and Questions

For more information on the Nebraska Minority Justice Committee visit www.nebar.com/publicinfo/minority_justice.htm or call (402) 475-7091. The MJC is at the beginning stages of a long-term effort. While it may take years to fully implement many of the recommendations, the Committee is developing long-term plans to promote change. Interest in the Minority Justice Committee’s mission and activities is appreciated and encouraged.



Minority and Justice Committee: *Sitting (from left to right):* Monica Miles-Steffens, Valorie Bendixen, Judy Beutler, Jane Schoenike, Hon. John Gerrard, Dr. Liz Neeley, Hon. Ken Vampola, Linda Crump, Linda Willard, and Janice Walker.

Standing (from left to right): Cecilia Huerta, Riko Bishop, Darrell Fisher, Hon. Vernon Daniels, Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, David Stickman, Alan Tomkins, Hon. John Irwin, Mohammed Sadden, Carlos Monzón, Anna Williams Shavers, Jim Rembolt, Judi gaiashkibos, Mark Young, and José Soto.

Not pictured: Daphne Aronson, Hon. Edna Atkins, Dean Patrick Borchers, John Grant, Anne Hobbs, Dennis Keefe, Kate Mahern, Natalie Malmberg, D. Milo Mumgaard, Hon. Marlon Polk, Harold Rock, Hon. Robert Steinke, Terry Waite, Thomas Warren, Dean Steven Willborn, and Sherman Willis.

Members of the Minority Justice Committee

Co-Chairs:

Linda Crump, Equity, Access & Diversity Programs UNL
Hon. John Gerrard, Nebraska Supreme Court

Committee:

Daphne Aronson, Diversity Officer,
Kutak Rock

Hon. Edna Atkins, Douglas County Court

Valorie Bendixen, Clerk of the District
Court for Hall County

Judy Beutler, Administrative Office
of the Courts

Riko Bishop, Attorney at Law

Dean Patrick Borchers, Creighton
University School of Law

Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, State Probation
Administrator

Hon. Vernon Daniels, Separate Juvenile
Court Douglas County

Darrell Fisher, Lt. Col., Nebraska
State Patrol

Judi gaiashkibos, Nebraska Commission
on Indian Affairs

John Grant, Attorney at Law

Anne Hobbs, Nebraska Equal Opportunity
Commission

Cecilia Huerta, Nebraska Mexican
American Commission

Hon. John Irwin, Nebraska Court
of Appeals

Dennis Keefe, Lancaster County Public
Defender

Kate Mahern, Milton Abrahams
Legal Clinic

Natalie Malmberg, Certified Court
Interpreter

Monica Miles-Steffens,
Judicial Branch Education

Carlos Monzón, Attorney at Law

D. Milo Mumgaard, Nebraska
Appleseed Center

Liz Neeley, PhD, University of Nebraska
Public Policy Center

Hon. Marlon Polk, Douglas County
District Court

Jim Rembolt, Attorney at Law

Harold Rock, Attorney at Law

Mohammed Sadden, Attorney at Law

Jane Schoenike, Nebraska State
Bar Association

José Soto, Southeast Community College

Hon. Robert Steinke, Platte County
District Court

David Stickman, Federal Public Defender

Alan Tomkins, Public Policy Center

Hon. Ken Vampola, Dodge County Court

Terry Waite, Attorney at Law

Janice Walker, State Court Administrator

Thomas Warren, Omaha Police
Department

Linda Willard, Nebraska Attorney
Generals Office

Anna Williams Shavers, University of
Nebraska College of Law

Sherman Willis, Attorney at Law

Dean Steven Willborn, University of
Nebraska College of Law

Mark Young, Hall County Attorney

— *Equal Justice Before the Courts* —

Support the MJC

The MJC is supported in part by the Nebraska State Bar Association's Charitable Funds, Inc. (www.nebar.com/nsbainfo/otherorgs/cfi/index.htm). To support the future efforts of the Minority Justice Committee, please make a tax deductible contribution to NSBA Charitable Funds, Inc. today!

Nebraska State Bar Association Charitable Funds, Inc.
635 S. 14th Street, P.O. Box 81809
Lincoln, NE 68501-1809



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State Bar Association