



MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH

# COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

## Eighth Judicial District Community Listening Session

Willmar, Minnesota

April 22, 2017

“It is the policy of the Minnesota Judicial Branch to identify and eliminate barriers to racial, ethnic, and gender fairness within the judicial system, in support of the fundamental principle of fair and equitable treatment under law.”

*Minnesota Judicial Branch, Judicial Council Policy, Racial, Ethnic and Gender Fairness Policy, 10.02*

## INTRODUCTION

The Eighth Judicial District Equal Justice Committee held a community listening session on April 22, 2017 at the Willmar Public Library, Willmar, Minnesota from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.. There are several communities in the Eighth Judicial District. Some communities in the district are diverse. Others are not as diverse. The district is comprised of 13 counties in western Minnesota. Willmar is the largest population center in the district. Willmar is the home to two large immigrant communities—Latino and Somali. The committee advertised the April 22, 2017 listening session in English and Somali. Some members of the Eighth Judicial District Equal Justice Committee provided outreach to the Somali community. The committee discussed holding another community listening session in the future, with advertising in English and Spanish. The committee felt that holding a listening session with non English-speaking participants in more than two languages might be confusing.

### Community Dialogue Plan

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has adopted a Community Dialogue Plan. The purpose is to:

Create a public forum for community members to describe their experiences and discuss ideas for advancing equality and fairness regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected by law.

## SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

Committee members Charly Leuze and Jehana Schwandt distributed about sixty flyers in English and Somali in Willmar. Copies of the flyers are attached to this report. Ms. Leuze and Ms. Schwandt also talked with persons and encouraged them to attend the listening session. They left flyers at local Somali businesses and gave them to individuals. Charly Leuze and Judge Thomas Van Hon made arrangements for light refreshments two days before the meeting at a grocery store and restaurant and encouraged community members to attend. Despite the efforts of Ms. Leuze and Ms. Schwandt, only a few community members attended the listening session.

Eighth Judicial District EJC members Hal Sillers, Charly Leuze, Cheryl Eckhardt, Senior Judge Jon Stafsholdt, and Judge Thomas Van Hon attended the listening session as well as Eighth Judicial District Judges Michael Thompson, David Mennis, Dwayne Knutsen, Charles Glasrud, and Jennifer Fisher. Eighth Judicial District Administrator Tim Ostby, Guardian ad Litem Coordinator Jody Skindelien, and Kandiyohi County Attorney Shane Baker also attended.

The EJC invited justice partners in Kandiyohi County from law enforcement, probation, family services, and the public defender's office to the listening session, in addition to the county attorney's office.

The committee welcomed any participants to leave contact information in order to receive a copy of this report, but did not insist that they do so. One community member left contact information.

The committee hired interpreter Abdikadir Gaal to interpret in the Somali language. Hal Sillers, a member of the EJC committee, is a certified Spanish interpreter and was available to interpret if any Spanish-speaking participants attended.

The judges and court staff visited with the participants informally before the listening session started. The court provided bottled water, tea from a Somali-owned restaurant, and cookies from a Somali grocer.

Judge Thomas Van Hon welcomed the participants. He explained the purpose of the listening session and invited persons to describe their experiences with the courts. The other judges and judicial branch employees asked questions and provided information during the listening session.

The community members stated that they believed the courts were fair and that the courts have a reputation of fairness in the community. One community member left during the listening session, indicating that he had no complaints. One judge asked the community members why they settled in Minnesota, where the climate is very different from Somalia. One community member explained that she moved here "because that's where we were welcome."

The community members thanked court employees for holding the session. The court employees thanked the community members for coming and sharing their experiences.

## **Major Themes**

### [Accessibility of the Courts for Non English Speakers](#)

Hal Sillers, Staff Interpreter and EJC member, asked the community members about their perceptions of interpretation services at court. The community members did not have any comment on interpretation of court proceedings. There was general discussion of the interpretation process. Mr. Gaal, the interpreter hired for the session, believed that there were enough Somali-speaking interpreters to handle the demand. A community member commented that accessing the courts was easier for educated persons. Judges explained that the Minnesota Judicial Branch has forms and

explanatory materials on its website in several languages, including Somali. The community member was given the website and a copy of the DVD *Going to Court in Minnesota*. Not all members of the Somali community read and write Somali, so the video presentation may be an effective way to educate the community about access to the courts.

### Differences Between the Somali and American Justice Systems

There was discussion about the justice systems in Somalia and the United States. It was reported that family elders often mediate disputes between persons in Somalia. The United States' justice system was described in the context of a hypothetical domestic assault charge. The community members and judges discussed the cultural similarities in condemning domestic violence along with the different government responses to it.

### **Proposed Suggestions for Improving the Court System**

The EJC committee did not receive suggestions from the community for improving the courts. One community member present was a senior in high school. The judges spoke with her about whether outreach to the schools would help young persons better understand the courts. There was discussion about outreach to the schools.

In the future, the EJC committee will host a community listening session advertised in English and Spanish. It is possible that the committee will partner with a community agency or group to increase attendance. The EJC committee received a presentation on race data in the Eighth Judicial District at an EJC committee meeting in 2016. The committee may study race data in more detail in the Eighth Judicial District. The committee makes no specific recommendations for change at this time.



"Nidaamka  
garsoorka waa  
mid dadka oo  
dhan u siman  
yahay..."

*Madaxa Qaalyada ee  
Maxkamadda Sare ee Minnesota  
Lorie S. Gildea*

## Kulanka Dhageysiga Ra'yiga Bulshada ee Qaaliyada & Shaqaalaha Maxkamadda

Waxaa Martigeliyey:

### Degmada Kandiyohi - Maxkamadda Degmada & Maamulka Maxkamadda ee Degmada 8aad

Sabtida 22ka Abriil 2017  
10ka Aroornimo ilaa  
12ka Duhurnimo

Waxaa lagu qabanayaa  
Willmar Public Library  
410 5th Street SW  
Willmar, MN 56201

- Kulan aan rasmi aheyn la qaado qaaliyada iyo shaqaalaha maxkamadda
- Ka hadal nidaamka garsoorka
- Nala wadaag oo ra'yigaaga ka dhiibo sida lagu hor marin karo garsoorka
- Ka caawi in maxkamaddu fahamto waayo aragnimada aad kala kulantay

**Waxaanu dooneynaa in aanu dhageysano ra'yigaaga!**

Dadweynaha waa u furan tahay – Cabitaan ayaa la bixinayaa



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Wixii macluumaad dheeraad ah la soo xiriir:  
Cheryl Eckhardt @ (320) 269-7774



"The  
justice system  
belongs to the  
people..."

*Minnesota Supreme Court  
Chief Justice  
Lorie S. Gildea*

## Community Listening Session with Judges & Court Staff

Hosted by:

## Kandiyohi County District Court & Minnesota's Eighth Judicial District

Saturday, April 22, 2017  
10 a.m. to Noon

Willmar Public Library  
410 5th Street SW  
Willmar, MN 56201

- Have informal discussions with judges and court officials
- Talk about your justice system
- Share ideas about improving your courts
- Help the court understand your experience

### WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Open to the public -- No RSVP required -- Light refreshments served



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For more information, contact :  
Cheryl Eckhardt @ (320) 269-7774