



MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Seventh Judicial District
Community Listening Session
November 6, 2019
Long Prairie - Grey Eagle Secondary School



SEVENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Community Listening Session was held at the Long Prairie - Grey Eagle Secondary School, 510 9th St. NE, Long Prairie, MN 56347. The Equal Justice Committee identified the location with the objective of trying to connect with Hispanic Community in the area. The general public was invited to attend.

The purpose was to have informal discussions with judges and court officials about the justice system, share ideas about improving the courts, and help the court understand community experiences.

Community Dialogues

Community Dialogues provide a way for the Minnesota Judicial Branch's Committee for Equality and Justice and each Judicial District Equal Justice Committee (EJC) to work together to achieve equitable treatment for all individuals in the court system. A Community Dialogue's stated purpose is to:

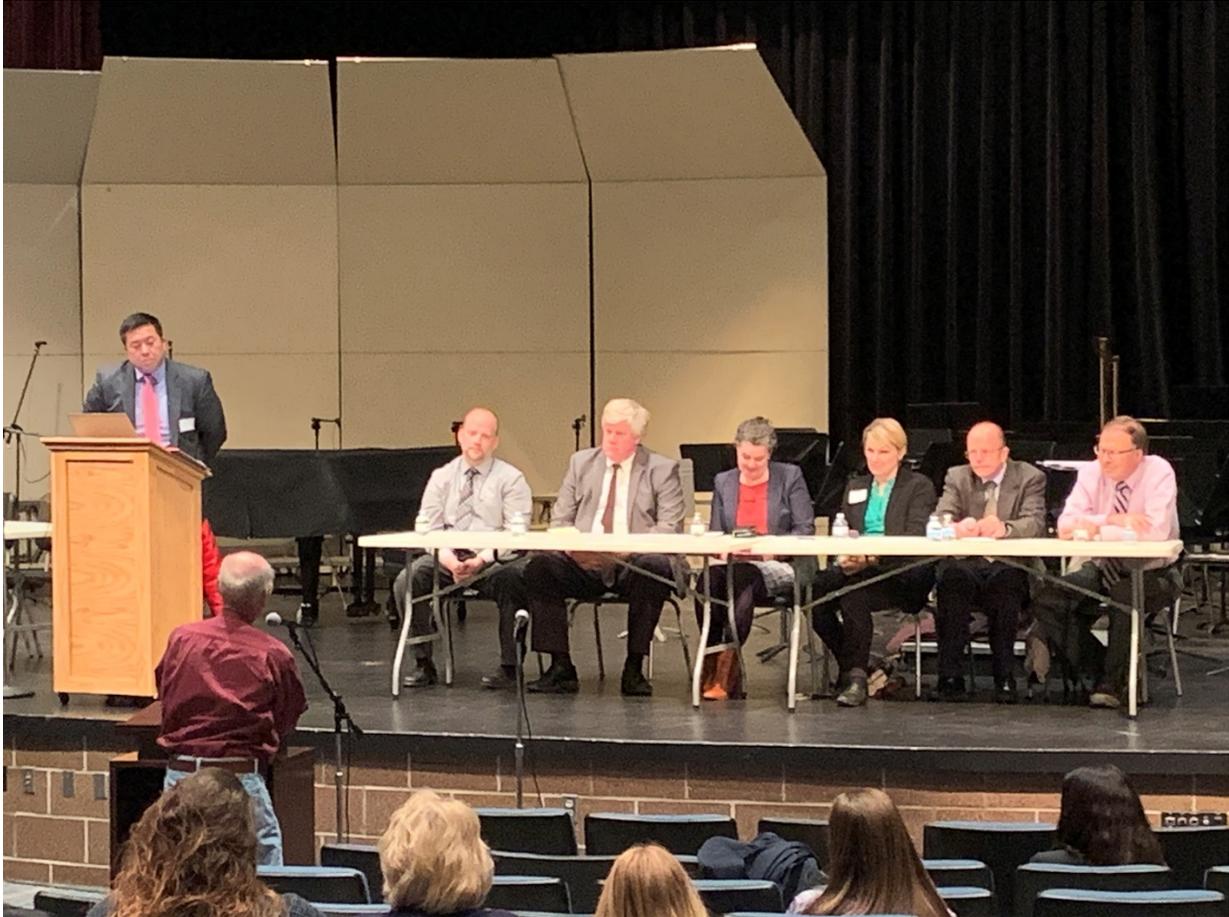
Create a public forum for community members to describe their experiences and discuss ideas for advancing equality and fairness regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected by law.

Seventh Judicial District, Todd County - Session Details

Wednesday, November 6, 2019, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Long Prairie – Grey Eagle Secondary School, 510 9th Street NE, Long Prairie, MN 56347

Judicial Panelists: Honorable Shan Wang, Chair of the 7th District Equal Justice Committee; Honorable Mark Herzing; Honorable Doug Clark; Honorable Sharon Grewell Benson; Honorable Gail Kulick; Honorable Daniel Benson; and Honorable John Scherer



Additionally in attendance were the Todd County Sheriff Steve Och; Kathy Langer, Community Corrections Director; and the Long Prairie Police Department, represented by Officers Duane Breiter and Ryan Hanson. Approximately 26 community members participated in the event.

To assist in facilitating the discussion, Spanish Interpreters Leonor Sillers and Hal Sillers were available at the check-in table and during the event. They provided simultaneous interpreting to community members for the event via a remote headset. The interpretation services allowed the community to see firsthand how interpreting is handled during court proceedings and how interpreters use technology in their work. The community inquired as to if there are enough interpreters which allowed the judges to highlight the excellent work the Judicial Branch has done in this area.

The Seventh Judicial District Equal Justice Committee would like to thank:

- Luan Thomas-Brunkort, Long Prairie Chamber of Commerce Director and Mary Holman Emblom, Long Prairie – Grey Eagle Community Education and School Readiness for their assistance in organizing this event

- Officers Duane Breiter and Ryan Hanson, Long Prairie Police for providing security.
- Court Interpreters Leonor Sillers and Hal Sillers for interpreting the event.



SUMMARY OF THE SEVENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT, TODD COUNTY – SESSION

Judge Wang provided opening remarks, introduced the panel, and facilitated the discussions. The event was a success as individuals felt free to ask questions and received answers from the panel. The judicial panelists provided excellent responses to several types of questions.

Discussion from the Listening Session

Discussions involved several topics ranging from domestic violence, the equal treatment of men and women in the criminal justice system, and the financial and emotional impact of defendants facing with criminal charges. Law enforcement and prosecutors' roles in the criminal justice system, and how they differ from the role of judges and court administration, were also discussed. The judges emphasized that everyone is entitled to due process which includes an opportunity to be heard and to be treated equally under the law. The judges also recognized that domestic violence is complicated and its impact is often felt by not only the witnesses and suspects but also their families. Finally, the judges acknowledged that some cases take too long to move through the system.

The community was asked what the Minnesota Judicial Branch could do better in response to the Access and Fairness Surveys. Audience members shared that cases can take too long to move through the system and the amount of time they spend in court should be shorter. They also were concerned about the cost of attending court hearings and the significant fines/fees incurred if a person is convicted (e.g., fines, probation fees, assessment fees, etc.). The audience had generally positive statements regarding jury service but thought the process can be time consuming which makes it difficult for the jurors.

Judges were asked to share what they liked most about their work and what frustrates them. Some of the responses are as follows:

Best:

- Words matters.
- You can change behaviors.
- You get to recognize successes when you see them.
- Adoptions.
- When you take a chance on someone and they succeed, it is rewarding.
- A bad choice does not mean someone is a bad person.
- Judging is like parenting as you are also a cheerleader.
- Encouraging when kids are able to chat about their lives.
- Often individuals are scared and frustrated; it is rewarding to take a few minutes to explain what is happening so that they understand.
- Enjoys working with the people.
- Being involved in the community.

Frustrations:

- Dealing with trauma wears on you.
- Judges are lost behind a computer screen.
- Frustrated that many success stories are never shared.
- If someone is doing well, the judge rarely sees them.
- Hard to connect with the number of people that are seen each day.
- Hard to see children whose parents do not show an interest.
- Hard to handle all the matters that are scheduled in a day.
- Hard when someone has to be last and they have been waiting for an extended period of time.
- Hard when trials are set so far out.
- It is hard when there is nothing the court can do further as they cannot resolve the issues beyond the case that is before them.
- Concern about making decisions based on imperfect information.

Judges were asked what advice they would provide to individuals coming to court. Some of the answers are as follows:

- Be on time.

- Stay calm.
- Don't come alone.
- Don't be afraid to ask.
- Get legal help.
- Dress appropriately.
- Know the purpose of your hearing so you know what will happen for this hearing.
- Wait for the appropriate time to make your case.
- Exhibits need to be offered on paper; they cannot take information from a cell phone.
- Court Administration can direct you to resources.
- Document what has happened so there is written proof of transactions.

Judges were asked if there are there enough interpreters. Some of the answers are as follows:

- The Judicial Branch has excellent interpreters. Hal Sillers is an employee and interprets hearings in person and via the telephone across the state.
- Interpreters are a fundamental right. If one is unavailable, the matter may require an individual to come back on another day.
- Discussed that judges should use plain language to make it easier for parties to understand court proceedings.
- Judges receive extensive training on other cultures and understanding non-verbal cues.

Judges were asked if they felt the courts are fair towards people. Some of the answers are as follows:

- Discussion occurred regarding sentencing guidelines and factors that affect the sentencing guidelines.
- 90 to 95% of case are resolved in plea negotiations.
- It was noted that even if individuals do not initially go to jail or prison, they are on probation and there is a chance that they could be sent to jail or prison if they violate their conditions of probation.
- Noted that the cost of representation is an issue.
- Noted there are too many hearings in civil matters.

Judges were asked if religion matters in court. Some of the answers are as follows:

- Religion does not affect sentencing.
- Exceptions may be granted in decorum, for example allowing an individual to cover their head or taking an oath under penalty.
- One concern is that judges need to be clear that individuals know their rights.

Proposed Suggestions for Improving the Court System

The Sheriff noted that Todd County is working on a comprehensive re-entry program for the community. Also, many individuals do not have money for gas or a way to get to court. They have started a program to assist those individuals.

The community is encouraged to contact their legislature and advocate for funding for more Guardians Ad Litem to assist children involved in domestic violence court cases.

Written Feedback from Participants:

1. What did you like the most about the Community Dialogue Session?
 - a. The informal dialogue with judge insight.
 - b. To hear the judges' side of court. To get a better understanding of the court system from a judges' point of view.
 - c. The indications of barriers and brainstorming on how to solve them.
 - d. I enjoyed being able to be in a laid back setting with judges, hearing their opinions and knowledge.
 - e. Appreciated the commitment by the judges to be present and available on the panel. Thank you.
2. How would you improve the Community Dialogue Session?
 - a. Encourage more community member to attend. Get the info out there.
 - b. More publicity
 - c. I would not make any improvements. All of the judges were very nice + I enjoyed the experience.
 - d. Keep doing it – more promotion.

Additional written information provided to question discussed during the evening.

- Fees are high for most civil proceedings and I wish that things could be resolved or dissolved at a lower cost.
- I feel overall our courts are as fair as possible with the cases that come forward. I feel younger adults with no experience or knowledge struggle more due to lack of knowledge and lack of asking questions.
- I have faith in the system

COMMUNITY OUTREACH/ PUBLICITY EFFORTS

With the assistance of the Long Prairie Chamber of Commerce, the event was posted on the Chamber of Commerce Community Page. Information flyers were prepared by the State Court Administrator's Office Court Information Office and translated into Spanish. On Monday, October 7, 2019, the following press release was sent to the media outlets in the community along with the Spanish and English Flyers. Specific publications included:

- La Voz Libre (lavoziibremn@gmail.com)
- Dairyland Peach <dave.searcy@ecm-inc.com>
- Long Prairie Leader <news@lpleader.com>
- Benning Printing Publishing ray@inhnews.com

Press Release

Public invited to attend and share their experiences at community listening session with Seventh Judicial District Judges and Staff

For immediate release

Long Prairie, Minn. (October 7, 2019) – The Seventh Judicial District is hosting a community listening session in support of their Equal Justice Committee efforts to understand and improve the experience of the public with the judicial system. The event will be held on Wednesday, November 6 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Secondary School.

The listening session is intended to be an informal discussion with judges and court official about the local justice system and the experiences and ideas for improvement that people who live in the district may have. Understanding the experience of court participants is a critical piece of ensuring courts are working to improve access to justice and public trust and confidence in the justice system.

Light refreshments will be served. This event is free and open to the public and media are welcome to attend. No RSVP is necessary for media or the public. Those interested in more information should contact Marcia Setrum at 320-656-3649.

Who Judges and staff from Minnesota's Seventh Judicial District

What Community Listening Session

Where Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Secondary School
510 9th Street NE
Long Prairie, MN 56347

When 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 6, 2019

About the Minnesota Judiciary

The Minnesota Judicial Branch is made up of 10 judicial districts with 295 district court judgeships, 19 Court of Appeals judges, and seven Supreme Court justices. The Judicial Branch is governed by the Judicial Council, which is chaired by [Lorie S. Gildea](#), Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. The Minnesota Judicial Branch is mandated by the Minnesota Constitution to resolve disputes promptly and without delay. In 2018, there were nearly 1.2 million cases filed in district courts in Minnesota. For more information please visit www.mncourts.gov.

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Alyssa Siems Roberson

Director of Public Affairs
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25 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155
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"The
justice system
belongs to the
people..."

*Minnesota Supreme Court
Chief Justice
Lorie S. Gildea*

Community Listening Session with Judges & Court Staff

Hosted by:

Minnesota's Seventh Judicial District

Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2019
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle
Secondary School
510 9th St. NE
Long Prairie, MN 56347

- 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



"El
Sistema judicial
le pertenece
a la gente.."

*Presidenta de la Corte
Suprema de Minnesota
Lorie S. Gildea*

Sesión con los jueces y el personal del tribunal para escuchar a la comunidad

Presentado por:

El Distrito Judicial Séptimo de Minnesota

Miércoles, 6 de Noviembre
de 2019

De 6:00 p.m. a 8:00 p.m.

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle
Secondary School

510 9th St. NE

Long Prairie, MN 56347

- Conversaciones informales con los jueces y los funcionarios del tribunal
- Hablar sobre el sistema judicial
- Compartir ideas sobre como mejorar los tribunales
- Ayudar al tribunal a entender su experiencia

¡QUEREMOS OIRLOS A USTEDES!

Abierto al público – No necesita RSVP – Habrá refrescos



**MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

Para mayor información, comuníquese con:
Marcia Setrum @ (320) 656-3649