



# MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH

## TENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

### **EJC Community Dialogue Report**

*February 21, 2018*

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#### **Location and Background of Attendees**

This Community Dialogue was held by Tenth Judicial District Equal Justice Committee at the Fridley Community Center on February 21, 2018. Attendees came from various backgrounds, the public, court certified interpreters in several languages, including Arabic, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish, and were available for the public. Several members from the justice system, including prosecutors, judges, police officers, corrections officers, and court administration personnel from various counties in the Tenth Judicial District, attended as well. The attendees met in a “world café” format, with small groups of people at each table. Each table was asked to address several issues/questions, and provided the following comments:

#### **Issue 1: Access to Justice**

##### *Transportation*

- In the metro areas of the District, bus and/or light rail transportation is possible, but not always easy. There is no straight bus route to courthouses, and with route transfers, it can make the travel time over an hour. The cost can make bus transportation not affordable too.
- From the rural areas, the only way to get to the courthouse is by car and many people do not have valid driver’s licenses.
- Suggestion that grant funding should be looked at to provide transportation for individuals to court; perhaps - include shuttle service, volunteer drivers, Uber schedule routes.
- Access has improved from what participants have seen in the past.
- Public Defenders shuffling people through the system, this is money not well spent.
- Should promote community dialogue. Courts should go out into the community and actively listen/participate in conversations.

- More community involvement in running the courts – similar to church councils.

### *Language*

- Language can be a barrier at every step, from not understanding a ticket/charge, to not understanding parking rules or court decorum, and not being able to communicate in the courtroom.
- Police officers need to represent and reflect the population they work within. If there were more diversity, it would minimize conflicts and increase comfort levels with the justice system and improve the community.
- Legal language and concepts can be difficult for English speakers, so imagine how difficult it is for a non-native English speaker or someone who speaks no English.
- Language can be a barrier for victims as they are not provided interpreters for court appearances.
- Discussion on the use of the language line and this option is not always the best.
- District has hired a full time Spanish interpreter.
- For families with children who are bilingual, children cannot be relied upon to translate documents or proceedings. While the children may understand both languages, they don't always fully understand the native tongue and won't be able to translate big concepts to their parents in their native language.
- Even with interpreters, accents and differences in dialects can present a communication problem.

### *Treatment Court*

- Should not have to commit a crime to get access to treatment courts – it should be proactive as well as reactive.
- Should expand the concept of treatment courts to other areas.
- Lack of doctors\access to healthcare leads to drug use and mental health issues.

### *Courthouse Accessibility*

- Adding Satellite courts to communities without good public transportation would bring justice closer to the people.

### *Things to remove from the System*

- Warrants on traffic tickets/issues are unjust.
- Driving After Revocation: people should not sit in jail for that
- Petty shoplifting
- Cost to obtain driver's license back = perpetuates the whole system is a cycle; courts should work collaboratively with DPS.

## **Issue 2: Implicit Bias**

- Assumptions are made about others.
- Statistics and data suggest more people of color are incarcerated, but what's the causality? Law enforcement, prosecutorial, judicial, etc.? Some people wanted this issue addressed.
- Discuss how bias impacts court users, for an example, if defendant looks tough, likely to be treated tough.
- Discussed how implicit bias impacts victims on domestic assault and criminal sexual conduct cases, i.e. cannot appear in "sexy" clothes or jury may victim-blame, have implicit bias of the victim's intentions, history.
- Large Somali community- Dynamics that typical people on a jury do not understand.
- Shared personal stories of own experiences with implicit bias, i.e. lived in China and India, residents had assumptions about her (made her uncomfortable, etc.) – implicit bias exists for people in the community.
- Create positions in the court to meet needs of community, i.e. Community Outreach position.
- Discussion on the need to dismantle white supremacy.
- There is perception that people of difference races are treated differently, that people of color receive bigger sentences, or are arrested more often, or have higher bail set. In addition, the system is harder on those with limited incomes, in terms of time, money, fees, etc.
- There are bureaucratic complications and barriers in the system.
- Relationships are important → But shouldn't the system be inherently relationship-neutral?
- People observed that anyone with a deep understanding of the system and the laws will do a better job than someone without those skills. People seem to get better results when they have an attorney.
- Indigent individuals require the most help.
- Have people from diverse population speak at community dialogues to educate others in attendance at the event.
- Laws biased against people of color, American Indians, poor people (laws coded with implicit bias).
- More diversion programs.

### *Education and employment Staff*

- Post on Indeed, Facebook, Twitter, other types of social media.
- Justice system is flawed and heavily biased against non-white Americans.
- Education of court/legal justice staff on implicit bias, racism.

- Racism is the greatest barrier to equal justice/access to justice.
- Ongoing training on bias, cultural responsibilities.
- Diversifying court system staff to represent community served
- Educate Court staff/Judges/Judicial staff on culture/races
- Diversity training for judges and staff.

Overall, community participants praised the Tenth Judicial District for its ongoing efforts, outreach and responsiveness but clearly indicated we have a long ways to go and there is much room for improvement.

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