



**MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH**

# SCOTT and CARVER COUNTIES COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Scott and Carver Counties conducted a community listening session on May 22, 2018 at the Scott County Community Center, Shakopee, MN.

The Community Listening Session was an opportunity for community members to talk to judges and court staff in small group conversations. The listening session was attended by the public, judges and court staff from both Scott and Carver Counties, First Judicial District staff and other justice partners.



## Community Dialogue

### SCOTT and CARVER COUNTIES DISTRICT COURT REPORT

#### INTRODUCTION

The Scott and Carver Counties Listening Session was held at the Scott County Community Center, 1255 Fuller Street South, Shakopee, MN 55379. Flyers were distributed to many community organizations and businesses and to county agencies for posting. The invitation was also posted on the Carver County website as well as community Facebook pages. A press release was distributed by the State Court Administrator's Communications Office.

This was the third community listening session planned by the First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee serving Dakota, Scott, Carver, LeSueur, McLeod, Goodhue, and Sibley Counties since 2010. Previous listening sessions were held in Chaska and Apple Valley.

#### Community Dialogues

Community dialogues provide a way for the 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.

#### Scott and Carver Counties Session Details

May 22, 2018 6:00 p.m.

Scott County Community Center, 1255 Fuller Street South, Shakopee, MN 55379

#### Attendees:

- First Judicial District EJC members: Judge Wahi, Jeri Boetcher, Chris Channing, Brenda Koenig, and Mary Dalbec, Carver County Court Administrator
- Vicky Carlson, Scott County Court Administrator, served as moderator
- Judge Offermann provided an overview of the Minnesota Judicial Branch
- First Judicial District Judges: Braaten, Carter, Eide, King, Offermann, Wahi and Winters
- Brian Jones, First Judicial District Administrator and eight other First Judicial District administrative staff participated as facilitators or note takers
- Steve Holmgren, First Judicial District Public Defender and Scott County Sheriff, Luke Hennen
- Erika Pavon, First Judicial District Spanish interpreter
- Fourteen members from the community

After a brief introduction, Judge Offermann gave a brief overview of the Minnesota Judicial Branch and Scott and Carver Counties. Then each table discussed two questions. Finally, the staff note-taker reported out the table's discussion to the larger group.

The following handouts were provided at the session and are included at the end of this report:

- Agenda
- First Judicial District Equality and Justice Brochure

## **SUMMARY OF THE SCOTT AND CARVER COUNTIES SESSION**

The goals of the session were to:

- Hear and learn from community members about their experiences in the Scott and Carver County Courts
- Listen to community members ideas on how to improve the quality of service, accessibility, and fair treatment.
- Use what is learned to make changes to ensure that all court users' needs are met and that rights are respected when interacting with the courts.

### **Discussion from the Listening Session**

There were two main questions that each table discussed.

Question 1: Why did you come to the session and what would you like us to know?

Question 2: If you could change or improve anything about the courts, what would it be?

There were no major themes from the listening session. However, there were many singular items discussed including: protection of victims at hearings that involve the alleged violator, the high volume of cases with limited judicial resources to hear them, jails holding defendants that need mental health assistance, improved customer service for all court and justice system staff, complex court processes and procedures, how the public can learn more about the court system, the need for additional resources for self-represented litigants, disparity in treatment of family court participants, judicial ethics, how to obtain consistency in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases, restorative practices, call in system for jurors, the need to identify a mechanism to evaluate parenting evaluators, and the high cost of lengthy court cases.

It was valuable for the judges and court administrative staff to hear directly about the experience of their customers.

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

Suggestions were made by those who attended the community listening session:

1. Do arbitration

2. Listen to litigants
3. Identify a way to evaluate custody evaluators and consultants
4. Identify better methods to keep parties of domestic violence cases separated at court
5. Make parties aware of available resources before going to court
6. Consider panel of judges to hear cases
7. Have judges hear the same types of cases
8. Provide more GAL funding and training
9. Make resources available for restorative practices
10. Have a call center/line for jurors to contact
11. Offer additional resources to educate individuals on all case types
12. Customer service training
13. Provide information on going to and observing court
14. Have a more timely resolution for orders to be filed. Allow more judge time to do orders, read documents and listen to parties in court
15. Simplify divorce process
16. Provide for more ways to hear from families and service providers
17. Hold listening sessions specifically on ICWA cases
18. Provide additional training for court administration on assisting individuals with obtaining subpoenas
19. Provide resources to assist parties who change from being represented by an attorney to becoming self-represented

### **Improvements/Changes made as a result of the Listening Session:**

1. One of the suggested improvements included having a call center or jury phone line for jurors to call in to know if they have to report. A juror reported that over 20 years previously there was no call in system. *A jury call in line has been in place for many years in both Scott and Carver Counties.*
2. Listen to litigants – The procedural fairness/procedural justice bench card was distributed to and discussed with judges. <http://www.amjudges.org/publications/courtrv/cr53-4/PJ-Bench-Card-Full-Final.pdf>
3. Additional resources for going to court and what hearings are open to the public to observe will be added to the Scott and Carver County District Court websites.
4. A request for additional information to be posted on the Minnesota Judicial Branch website regarding how self-represented litigants receive subpoenas has been submitted to the Minnesota Judicial Branch self-help center.
5. Importance of good customer service is being included during the First District All Staff training day. Additionally, Scott and Carver County court administration staff will be viewing an education session on giving legal information vs legal advice.
6. The Minnesota Judicial Branch self-help center continues to make additions and improvements to available resources for self-represented litigants.
7. Scott County is currently in the process of seeking and implementing additional mental health resources.

## Suggestions for Future Community Dialogue Sessions

Suggestions for improving future dialogue sessions:

- Identify specific groups or community programs and attend these events to obtain additional community participation and engagement.
- Begin the program by discussing previous listening sessions and what was learned from them and any changes that were implemented as a result.
- Limit the focus of the session to a specific line of business such as family, CHIPS, Criminal, etc.
- Work closely with community leaders to gain participation from individuals that will participate and describe their experiences and ideas to advance equality and fairness in the court system regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected by law.



## Scott and Carver County Court Community Listening Session

Tuesday, May 22, 2018 6:00 – 7:30 pm

Shakopee Community Center  
1255 Fuller Street  
Shakopee, MN 55379

6:00 – 6:15pm **Welcome and Introductory Remarks** (Judge Ann Offermann and Vicky Carlson, Scott County Court Administrator)

- Introductions
- Summary of the Committee for Equality and Justice and First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee
- Brief Court System Overview
- Purpose and Goals of the Community Listening Session:
  - Area of focus is the courts, not others from public safety such as the police, probation, other county programs/services, etc.
- Explain Small Group Listening Process

6:15-7:05pm **Small Group Discussion**

- At tables, discuss these questions:
  - Why did you come to the session and what would you like us to know?
  - If you could change or improve anything about the courts, what would it be?

7:05-7:20pm **Reports to Large Group from Small Groups**

- Note takers will report out themes/summary of the thoughts and ideas shared

7:20-7:30pm **Closing Remarks**

- A written report about this dialogue session will be posted on the Minnesota Judicial Branch website in approximately 90 days for public viewing.  
<http://www.mncourts.gov/MinnesotaJudicialCouncil/CEJ.aspx>
- Please complete the evaluations on your table and hand them in to the information table as you leave this evening. Your thoughts and concerns are very important to the work of the courts as we strive to provide equal access to justice to all of our citizens.
- Thank you for your participation!

This community listening session is hosted by: The First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee in partnership with local courts and community partners  
For more information about Scott and Carver County Courts, visit: <http://www.mncourts.gov/>

### Committee for Equality and Justice (CEJ)

The mission of the CEJ is to work collaboratively across the Judicial Branch to advance efforts to eliminate bias from court operations, promote equal access to the court, and inspire a high level of trust and public confidence in the Minnesota Judicial Branch. To accomplish this mission, the Committee is charged with:

- Recommending diversity and inclusion education programs and course materials for Judges and Judicial Branch employees.
- Promoting diversity and inclusion in the Judicial Branch employment and in appointments to Judicial Branch committees and boards to reflect the population served by the Judicial Branch.
- Making recommendations for improvement in court processes, procedures and policies as they relate to race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected by law.
- Assisting district Equal Justice Committees in their work at the local level, and providing assistance in outreach efforts to the communities they serve.

Membership for the Committee for Equality and Justice is reflective of the state's geographic and demographic diversity. It is comprised of 26 individuals who are justice system partners, attorneys, court employees, Judges and members of the public.



The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle over 120,000 cases annually in the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley.



## The First Judicial District Committee for Equality and Justice



Scott County  
District Court  
200 Fourth Ave W  
Shakopee, MN 55379  
952-496-8200



Carver County  
District Court  
604 E Fourth St  
Chaska, MN 55318  
952-361-1420



**MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL BRANCH**  
FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT—SCOTT AND CARVER COUNTIES

### Introduction

In 2010, the Minnesota Judicial Branch created the Committee for Equality and Justice (CEJ). The CEJ is charged with working collaboratively across the Judicial Branch to advance efforts to eliminate bias from court operations, promote equal access to the court, and inspire a high level of trust and public confidence in the Minnesota Judicial Branch. As part of the 2016-2017 Strategic Plan, the Committee for Equality and Justice adopted a goal that each individual judicial district would begin judicial community outreach to allow court users the opportunity to describe their experiences and provide recommendations to address issues regarding equality and fairness.

### Community Dialogues

The Community Dialogues provide a template for the statewide Committee for Equality and Justice and the individual Judicial District Equal Justice Committees to work together to achieve equitable treatment for all individuals in the court system. The 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.

The public is able to meet judges and share ideas and concerns related to the court system, including ideas for improving the courts. The session also allows judges and administration to listen first-hand to the individual experiences of members of the public.

### Why We Do This

The Judicial Branch has targeted three strategic priorities for progress and innovation:

#### Access to Justice

- Modify access and service delivery methods
- Improve accessibility to the courts for self-represented litigants, vulnerable adults and persons handicapped in communication

#### Effective Administration of Justice

- Explore cost effective and efficient ways to create and maintain the court record
- Continue Judicial Branch support for Treatment Courts

#### Public Trust and Confidence

- Continue efforts to assess and improve court performance and accountability.
- Collaborate with others in justice system to enhance services to diverse populations.
- Continue efforts to provide judicial officers and court personnel with the materials, motivation, direction, sense of mission, and commitment to do quality work.