

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 2015 Status Report**  
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The 24-member Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness was established in January 2005 in a collaborative effort among the three branches of state government. Its broad-based membership consists of appointments from both the majority and minority parties of the House and Senate, the Governor's office, and the Supreme Court. The membership is organized into six committees. Highlights of their recent work include the following:

**The Criminal Justice Committee's** study of racial/ethnic/socioeconomic disparities in Pennsylvania's capital justice system is nearing completion, with a draft expected by September 1 and the final report by late October 2015. The timing is fortuitous in that Pennsylvania's new Governor announced a moratorium on the imposition of the death penalty earlier this year. The moratorium will be in place until the Governor receives and analyzes our report on disparities and a second report from a broader study currently being conducted by a state legislative commission. Our executive director is working directly with the Governor's office and the legislative commission to secure reforms in the administration of the capital justice system. The Criminal Justice Committee is also actively involved in the related effort to reform Pennsylvania's indigent defense system. In addition to co-hosting statewide meetings among the state's chief public defenders, the committee is also seeking support for legislation to establish the Pennsylvania Center for Effective Indigent Defense Representation. Among other duties, the Center will provide intensive training for all state public defenders.

**The Interpreter Services Committee** is collaborating with Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts ("AOPC") to assist the courts in providing meaningful access to Limited English Proficient persons in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The office continues to train Pennsylvania district court judicial officers and administrators on compliance with Title VI and Pennsylvania's law and regulations on the provision of interpreters in state courts. As a part of that effort, the Committee recently co-sponsored an extensive training program in Philadelphia, *Opening the Court House Doors to Limited Proficient Individuals – Language Access in Pennsylvania Courts and Administrative Agencies*. Eighteen experts in language services spoke during the program, which was made available on the web to all judicial districts. Pennsylvania's judicial districts also recently completed and submitted their individual language access plans to the AOPC, which will review and incorporate them into a statewide language access plan for Pennsylvania.

**The Equal Opportunity and Diversity Committee** sponsored its third annual training session in January of 2015 for women and minority attorneys on the process of running for judicial office in Pennsylvania. In connection with the program, the Committee distributed copies of its guidebook, *Creating a Diverse Bench in Pennsylvania*, which provides detailed information on establishing a campaign, complying with statutory election requirements, raising funds, and working with the media. In May, the Committee also co-sponsored a special program, *The Double Bind of Race and Gender: Research and Strategies for Women of Color in the Law*, focused on the special challenges facing

women of color in the legal profession. Comcast Vice-President and Foundation Director, Charisse R. Lillie, served as keynote speaker and moderated a panel of four prominent female attorneys of color from the western region of the state. Additionally, the Committee is still working with the Pennsylvania Bar Association to secure authorization from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to add a voluntary check-off box for the applicants' race and ethnicity on its attorney license application forms. The purpose of the initiative is to establish a baseline from which to measure progress in diversifying Pennsylvania's legal profession.

Pennsylvania recently passed a new anti-human trafficking law, Act 105, which expands the legal definition of human trafficking in the state, provides new and enhanced protection for victims and calls for a state plan to coordinate anti-trafficking initiatives. For its part, **the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Victims Committee** accepted an invitation to join the new statewide organization, Pennsylvania Alliance Against Trafficking of Humans ("PAATH"), whose mission is to coordinate anti-human human trafficking efforts by Pennsylvania's many organizations that provide direct services to victims. The alliance will also gather data on human trafficking and coordinate training among the various agencies and individuals that work with juveniles, including the courts. Toward that end, the Philadelphia County Courts recently established the first Juvenile Human Trafficking Court for victims of human trafficking. The special court uses a multidisciplinary approach to help the victims following their arrest, by coordinating the provision of services to address the safety, housing, education, and mental and physical health needs of victims, and their access to benefits.

**The Jury Service Committee** has completed its Juror Pilot Program in which four judicial districts were asked to collect demographics from prospective jurors, including their race, ethnicity, gender and age, at three stages of the jury selection process: response to summons, appearance at the courthouse for jury duty and being seated on a jury panel. The project's goal was to assist judicial districts in tracking the demographics of their juries as a means of increasing diversity and public participation on juries. In addition to this project, the Committee completed its research on two other jury diversity-related issues: court-sponsored childcare for jurors, and juror hardship and excusal policies. All three of the projects will be incorporated into a larger report, *Suggested Standardized Procedures for Jury Selection in the Courts*, which the Committee will present to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court by year's end. The Committee also continues to seek solutions to duplication problems with the statewide juror list, which have stymied the aim of the program to use more inclusive lists to increase diversity on state juries.

**The G.L.B.T. Rights Committee** has been working on a new initiative involving the treatment of GLBT youth in delinquency and dependency status in Pennsylvania. The Committee learned that on the delinquency side, GLBT youth may be harassed by other children and staff in a juvenile detention facility. There also may be issues with respect to sleeping arrangements and bathrooms for transgender youth. On the dependency side, a child may be placed in homes that are not tolerant or even discriminate against them. As a consequence of this information, the Committee has been working with the judiciary and juvenile court administrators to establish training protocols for juvenile delinquency and dependency staff, as well as court personnel.