

2021 National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts Conference  
Commission on Race & Gender Fairness and Language Access  
Indiana State Report (2019 – 2021)

Indiana Supreme Court's Commission on Race & Gender Fairness (RGFC) works to ensure equity in the Indiana judiciary. In recognition of the need to do more, on June 5, 2020, Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Loretta Rush issued a Statement on Race and Equity, following the BLM protests sweeping the nation after the killing George Floyd.

The Commission also drafted a proposal for a dedicated "Diversity Training and Contact Person for the Court" [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator] position for the Court's approval. The Court approved the proposal and dedicated two positions – a Chief Diversity Officer and a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Coordinator! The two staff members will be joining the Court shortly to work on DEI matters.

Sustaining meaningful reform requires intentional actions by developing key strategies for the Indiana judiciary. To that end, the Commission is tasked with developing an Indiana Equal Justice Call to Action Plan. This seven-step strategic plan will provide a roadmap to effect changes related to providing equity in the Indiana judiciary. Once completed, this strategic plan will be submitted to the Court for approval. Parallel to the strategic plan, the Chief Justice directed a formation of a 12-15-member task force to investigate the disparity points at all contacts with the justice system throughout the State, and to provide a report to the Court on their findings and recommendations. Members of this task force will include all three branches of the government, local and statewide stakeholders, and members of the Indiana Bar.

As of January 2021, Indiana joined ABA's newly formed Access to Justice Commission's Racial Justice Working Group, along with other states: Alaska, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington.

On equity issues related to ensuring meaningful language access to Limited English Proficient court users, Indiana Supreme Court's Language Access Advisory Committee (LAAC) formerly known as the Advisory Task Force on Language Access in Indiana Courts, developed a comprehensive Language Access Plan (LAP) for the Indiana judiciary. The LAP was completed in February 2019 and was approved on May 1, 2019 by the Indiana Judicial Conference Board of Directors.

The next year, in March 2020, NCSC assisted LAAC with implementation of the statewide LAP by developing the local template Language Access Plan that county courts can tailor to suit their local jurisdiction needs. Approximately forty local courts have submitted their local LAP. The local LAP will undergo periodic review and be updated every three years. The Statewide LAP will undergo review and update every five years.

Finally, the Indiana Supreme Court provides local county courts with grant awards to help ease the financial burden associated with providing court certified interpreters. In 2020, the Language Access Division received forty-three applications for a court interpreter grant. Also, in 2020, a total of fifty-five spoken foreign and sign language interpreters have been provided to Indiana courts. The applications constituted an approximate 37.2% increase in application from 2018, and 13.9% increase from 2019.

Despite the 2020 pandemic causing courts to pause proceedings, in 2021, Fifty-one applications have been received so far.

Efforts to provide equal access in a way that is equitable is an ongoing effort by the Indiana Supreme Court.