



MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH

Committee for Equality and Justice National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts Report May 2014

Background

In June 2010, the Minnesota Judicial Council authorized the formation of the Committee for Equality and Justice (CEJ). The Committee was established to advance the Judicial Branch’s efforts to eliminate from court operations bias that is based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected by law. The Committee is charged with:

1. Ensuring equal access to the courts and a fair and impartial courtroom;
2. Providing fair treatment of court users and employees;
3. Recommending education programs and course materials for judges and Judicial Branch employees;
4. Continuing to implement and monitor the recommendations of the [Minnesota Task Force on Gender Fairness](#) in the Courts;
5. Continuing to implement and monitor the recommendations of the [Race Bias Task Force](#);
6. Promoting diversity in the appointments to Judicial Branch committees and boards to reflect the population served by the Judicial Branch;
7. Promoting diversity in the selection and retention of court employees to reflect the population served by the Judicial Branch;
8. Promoting diversity in the selection of judges to reflect the population served by the Judicial Branch; and
9. Promoting a high level of trust and public confidence in the judicial system.

The CEJ began meeting in January 2011 and has spent this time identifying issues and developing subcommittees to accomplish its charge. Most of the Committee’s efforts have focused on gathering information on existing data, educational offerings, demographics, policies and procedures relating to diversity and on making recommendations for improvement as applicable. The recommendations resulting from the CEJ will be brought to the Judicial Council.

Committee for Equality and Justice Overview:	33 members including justice system partners, attorneys, court employees, judges and members of the public.
Co-Chairs:	Judge Tanya Bransford and Judge Mary Vasaly
Supreme Court Liaison	Justice Wilhelmina Wright
Court of Appeals Liaison	Judge Margaret Chutich
Term length:	Staggered term limits: 1-3 years
Average number of meetings:	Four meetings per year, plus subcommittee meetings throughout the year
The Committee consists of seven subcommittees including CEJ members and additional members of the public and legal community:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data Collection and Analysis 2. Elimination of Barriers to Access 3. Disability 4. Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity 5. Racial Fairness 6. Gender Fairness

2013-2014 Committee for Equality and Justice Highlights

1. Data Collection and Analysis

- Annually report adult major criminal cases by race and gender at various decision points, such as filing, trial/plea, disposition, commit to prison or jail.
- Advising State Court Administration on the FY14-15 Judicial Branch Strategic Plan goal of studying evidence based tool(s) for use in making pretrial release decisions statewide.

2. Elimination of Barriers to Access

- Helped create four 30-minute videos in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali: [Going to Court in Minnesota](#); 1,250 DVD videos were produced and distributed along with a video program on Twin Cities Public Television, YouTube and ECHO and Judicial Branch websites;
- ESL curriculum was also developed to be used in classrooms of adult learners around the state.

3. Disability

- Partnered with the State Court Administrator's Office to deliver and develop a training for judges and employees on *Understanding Clients with Autism in the Minnesota Courts* live WebEx CLE training with nearly 200 attendees statewide.
- Monitored statewide self-assessment of courthouse facilities for compliance with ADA to ensure courts are fully accessible to all users.

4. Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity

- Partnered with the State Law Library to develop an in-person CLE on *Working with Transgender Individuals in the Court System* with over 50 attendees.
- Continuing to recommend general LGBT educational efforts.

5. Racial Fairness

- Partnered with State Court Administrator's Office and ICWA experts to develop Cultural Perspectives *Understanding the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)* live WebEx CLE training with over 200 attendees statewide.
- Helping to reactivate EJC's where needed through collaboration and updating the Community Dialogue Toolkit.
- Advising State Court Administration on the FY14-15 Judicial Branch Strategic Plan goal of supporting the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI).

6. Gender Fairness

- Conducting New Judge Orientations and WebEx CLE training on *An Introduction to Implicit Bias* with over 230 attendees statewide.
- Worked with staff to re-issue the *Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Bench Guide* for use at all stages of family, order for protection, civil and criminal cases involving allegations of domestic violence.

For more information on the Committee for Equality and Justice, please visit: <http://www.mncourts.gov/?page=4451> or contact Melanie Larsen Sinouhassy, Minnesota Judicial Branch Diversity Specialist and CEJ Staff at: melanie.sinouhassy@courts.state.mn.us, 651-284-4343.