



MINNESOTA JUDICIAL BRANCH

FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Introduction

In 2010, the Minnesota Judicial Branch created the Committee for Equality and Justice. The Committee for Equality and Justice 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 (EJCs) 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.

First Judicial District Community Listening Session

A Community Listening session was hosted by the First Judicial District's Equal Justice Committee on Wednesday, April 26, 2017 at the Apple Valley Courthouse in Apple Valley, MN.



First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee Chair Judge Richelle Wahli, served as moderator. Judges Kathryn Messerich, Karen Aspaugh, Erica MacDonald, Michael Baxter, Colleen King, Ann Offermann and Jamie Cork participated as panelists.

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

An estimated 45-50 people attended the listening session. Notes were taken from this session capturing some common themes and issues. The discussions were lively and covered a range of topics relating to criminal court, family court, juvenile court and self-represented litigants.

Major Themes

Five major themes emerged at the Community Listening Session:

1. Procedural fairness for families and children navigating family and juvenile court system
2. Indian Child Welfare Act issues arising in juvenile court
3. Assistance for self-represented litigants
4. Chemical dependency issues in criminal cases
5. Continued and ongoing diversity related training for judges and court personnel.

Follow-up Session

The First Judicial District Equal Justice Committee will have a follow-up session on October 25, 2017 from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Apple Valley Courthouse where it intends to report on action taken by Dakota County Courts to address the stated concerns.