



MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Eighth Judicial District Community Listening Session

Willmar, Minnesota

June 12, 2018

“It is the policy of the Minnesota Judicial Branch to identify and eliminate barriers to racial, ethnic, and gender fairness within the judicial system, in support of the fundamental principle of fair and equitable treatment under law.”

Minnesota Judicial Branch, Judicial Council Policy, Racial, Ethnic and Gender Fairness Policy, 10.02

INTRODUCTION

The Eighth Judicial District Equal Justice Committee held a community listening session on June 12, 2018 at the Bremer Bank conference room in Willmar, Kandiyohi County. The Eighth Judicial District is comprised of 13 counties in western Minnesota. Willmar is the largest and most diverse population in the district. Willmar is the home to two large immigrant communities—Hispanic/Latino and Somali. In 2017, the Committee hosted a listening session at the Kandiyohi County Courthouse. Despite advertising, and reaching out to members of the Somali community, the 2017 turn-out was low. The committee decided to take a different approach in 2018 and seek out groups that already hold regular meetings. The committee reached out to the Latino Service Providers Network (LSPN) which meets on a regular basis to determine if they would host our event. The LSPN graciously agreed to host the event at Bremer Bank in Willmar, and provided lunch to attendees. Flyers were drafted and printed in both English and Spanish and were distributed to various committee members to advertise the meeting. The flyers were also included in an e-mail sent to a list of all members of the LSPN. On May 19, 2018 Judge Stephen Wentzell and Minnesota Court interpreters Hal and Leonar Sillers attended the Willmar Cinco De Mayo festival in Willmar to advertise for the community listening session. A booth was provided for a minimal fee. Several flyers for the meeting were handed out to community members in attendance. Questions about the Courts were answered, and brochures about Minnesota State Courts and Minnesota State Court careers, were distributed.

Community Dialogue Plan

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has adopted a Community Dialogue Plan. The 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.

SUMMARY OF THE JUNE 12th SESSION

Eighth Judicial District EJC members Hal Sillers, Charly Leuze, Jeanette Ohelers, Judge Stephen Wentzell, Retired Judge Jon Stafsholt, and Judge Thomas Van Hon attended the listening session. Eighth Judicial District Chief Judge Michael Thompson, Eighth Judicial District Administrator Tim Ostby, Guardian ad Litem Coordinator Jody Skindelien, Kandiyohi, Swift and Meeker County Court Administrator Deborah Mueske and Court Operations Supervisor Diane Gerhardson were also in attendance.

Approximately 20+ community members attended the listening session.

Hal Sillers, a member of the EJC committee, is a certified Spanish interpreter and was available to interpret if any Spanish-speaking participants required assistance. Interpretation was not requested during the meeting.

The Judges, EJC members, and court staff visited with the participants informally before the listening session started. Bremer Bank President Shane Johnson and LSPN member Javier Valenzuela provided an initial greeting and introduction.

Judge Stephen Wentzell provided introductions and explained the purpose of the listening session by inviting persons to describe their experiences with, and questions about, the Courts. Attendees were invited to raise questions at any time. Note cards were provided for attendees who preferred to write a question. The other Judges and Judicial branch employees gave a brief introduction and explanation of their role with the Courts.

Judge Wentzell provided a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the Court system and the Committee for Equality and Justice. Judge Wentzell facilitated questions after the presentation. The participants were very engaged and the period for questions and answers took over the remainder of the time for the meeting.

The community members thanked court employees for holding the session. The court employees thanked the community members for coming and sharing their experiences. A brief survey was handed out and the majority of participants still in attendance filled out the survey.

Major Themes

Community Involvement/ Mentoring

There were several questions and comments about the need for community mentoring of youth and adults involved in the criminal justice system. The participants were provided with information including the various restorative justice programs within the district.

Diversity within the Courts

There were several participant comments and ideas about how to further promote diversity in Minnesota Courts. Discussion centered on the need for more formal student programs to introduce a diverse group of students to the court system at an earlier age. Additionally, there were several survey comments discussing the need for additional community listening sessions. The participants were also informed that court staff around the State is facing numerous retirements and staff changes. The participants were informed about

Judicial Career resources and encouraged to apply, or inform others to apply who may be interested.

Proposed Suggestions

In the future, the 8th Judicial EJC committee will continue to attempt to partner with a community agency or group to increase attendance and participation. The 2018 attendance and participation increased substantially by partnering with LSPN. The committee will also discuss ideas raised at the listening session for school related programs and additional community outreach.