



MINNESOTA
**JUDICIAL
BRANCH**

Committee for Equality and Justice
Ten-Year Review of Community Dialogues
2008-2018

Table of Contents

2019 Committee for Equality and Justice Membership.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Committee for Equality and Justice	4
Community Dialogues	4
Review Process.....	5
Findings.....	6
1. Diversify court employees and judicial officers.....	7
2. Bail, fees, and fines; socioeconomic barriers.....	7
3. Difficulties regarding court appearances	9
4. Education for Judicial Branch employees and judicial officers	9
5. Education about the legal system for the community	11
6. Immigration	12
7. Language and cultural barriers	13
8. Diversion and sentencing.....	14
9. Jury pools.....	14
10. Juvenile court process	15
11. Mental health	15
12. Bias and fairness.....	16
13. Perception of the justice system	16
14. Family cases	17
General Observations.....	19
Next Steps	20
Other resources.....	20

2019 Committee for Equality and Justice Membership

Associate Justice Margaret H. Chutich
Committee Co-Chair

Judge Tracy M. Smith

Judge Tanya M. Bransford

Judge Robert A. Docherty

Judge JaPaul Harris

Judge Mark J. Kappelhoff

Judge Richelle M. Wahi

Judge Stephen J. Wentzell

Zuri Balmakund Santiago

John Buhta

Greg Egan

Claire Joseph

Kim Mammedaty

Elizabeth Walker

Judge Shari R. Schluchter
Committee Co-Chair

Judge Leslie E. Beiers

Judge John T. Cajacob

Judge Bridgid E. Dowdal

Judge Mark J. Herzing

Judge Shan C. Wang

Judge Korey Wahwassuck

Judge Angela Willms

Diane Carlson Beckler

David Classen

Athena Hollins

Alice Silkey

Jill Prohofsky

Andrew Wold

Introduction

For more than 10 years, Minnesota’s 10 judicial districts—through their local Equal Justice Committees (EJCs)—have held Community Dialogues soliciting input from communities about equality and fairness in state courts. The feedback from each Community Dialogue has been documented in a Community Dialogue session report.¹

These Community Dialogue reports provide a wealth of valuable information for the courts about community concerns regarding access to justice. They also provide a basis for identifying and evaluating the courts’ response to community concerns and for developing future actions to address concerns.

As part of its FY18-19 strategic plan, the members of the Minnesota Judicial Branch Committee for Equality and Justice reviewed the feedback collected from the Community Dialogues and summarized:

- Statewide trends;
- Concerns and recommendations for improvement made by the communities;
- Steps taken by the Minnesota Judicial Branch in response to community concerns; and
- Potential actions suggested by EJCs to further the goals of ensuring equality and access to justice.

The Committee for Equality and Justice reviewed reports from the nearly 30 Community Dialogues held by EJCs from June 2008 through July 2018.

Committee for Equality and Justice

The Committee for Equality and Justice was formed in 2010 by the Minnesota Judicial Council². It is tasked with the mission of working collaboratively across the Judicial Branch to advance efforts to eliminate bias from court operations, promote equal access to the courts, and inspire a high level of trust and public confidence in the Judicial Branch. Members of the Committee for Equality and Justice include judges, court employees, attorneys, justice system partners, and members of the public from across the state. The members of this Committee are also leaders of local EJCs and often leaders and participants in Community Dialogues themselves.

Community Dialogues

Community Dialogues are public events held by judicial district EJCs to seek and receive community feedback about access to justice and fairness in the courts. In 2008, the Racial Fairness Committee, a predecessor Committee to the Committee for Equality and Justice, developed the Community Dialogue

¹ The Community Dialogue reports can be found on the Committee for Equality and Justice webpage at <http://mncourts.gov/MinnesotaJudicialCouncil/CEJ.aspx>.

² The Judicial Council is the governing body of the Minnesota Judicial Branch. More information about the Judicial Council and its role can be found online: <http://www.mncourts.gov/MinnesotaJudicialCouncil.aspx>

concept and process of conducting community public forums. The Minnesota Judicial Branch Strategic Plan for FY16-17 required each judicial district to conduct at least one Community Dialogue.

The purpose of a Community Dialogue 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.

The Community Dialogues have been held in a variety of community spaces—community centers, schools, community colleges, senior centers, churches, casinos, public libraries, and even county jails. Those who attend Community Dialogues have included community members, judges and referees, court employees, public defenders, prosecutors, tribal judges and representatives, guardians ad litem, legal aid and private practice lawyers, representatives from law enforcement and corrections, and more. Many Community Dialogues have been general in nature, while others have focused on specific, relevant communities and topics such as juveniles and internet safety, conciliation court, housing, and others.

Review Process

2018 was the 10-year anniversary of EJC-led Community Dialogues. The Committee for Equality and Justice began to develop this review of the Community Dialogue reports in order to better understand statewide trends of concern and opportunities for improvement. The first step was to organize the broad content of the Community Dialogue reports. Because the Committee sought to discern trends across districts, the Committee included only topics and subtopics that were raised in two or more districts. Although community feedback reflected in the reports varied, the Committee for Equality and Justice determined that the feedback generally fell within 14 subjects:

1. [Diversify court employees and judicial officers](#)
2. [Bail, fees, and fines](#)
3. [Court appearances](#)
4. [Education for Judicial Branch employees and judicial officers](#)
5. [Education about the legal system for communities](#)
6. [Immigration](#)
7. [Language access and culture](#)
8. [Diversion and sentencing](#)
9. [Jury pools](#)
10. [Juvenile court processes](#)
11. [Mental health](#)
12. [Bias and fairness](#)
13. [Perception of justice system](#)
14. [Family cases](#)

In the fall of 2018, EJCs were asked to identify the actions taken in response to the issues raised at Community Dialogues. The EJCs were also invited to offer potential solutions to outstanding issues.

Information from the State Court Administrator’s Office about actions the Judicial Branch has taken from a Branch-wide perspective regarding issues raised in the Community Dialogues is also included in this report.

Findings

For each of the 14 subjects, we summarize the issues raised, and the recommendations made, by community members in Community Dialogues. We list these issues and recommendations as they were conveyed by the community, without further evaluation in this report. In addition, we identify the actions that the courts have taken in response to the issues raised by community members. Those actions were taken by one or more judicial districts or by the Judicial Branch as a whole; not all actions were taken by all districts. Finally, we also identify any suggestions made by EJs for potential future actions, again, without further evaluation in this report.

1. Diversify court employees and judicial officers

Issue

The concern is the need to recruit and hire a more diverse workforce and to encourage judicial officer candidates from diverse backgrounds to apply for appointment to the bench.

Community recommendations

The community recommended that the Minnesota Judicial Branch improve recruitment efforts, create mentorships for underrepresented students, and fund a Tribal Liaison position for the courts.

Courts' responses

The Judicial Branch does not appoint judges. Judges are either elected to open seats or appointed by the Governor, with the assistance of the Judicial Selection Commission. In an effort to promote diversity, judges have worked with affinity bar associations in educational events directed at expanding the pool of diverse candidates for judicial appointment.

Numerous actions have been taken to increase the diversity of court employees:

- Attending career and recruitment fairs aimed at diverse communities
- Attending community events to share career information
- Expanding advertising and recruitment to broaden applicant pools
- Employment of a Human Resources Diversity Specialist to promote recruitment and retention of underrepresented employees
- Developing relationships with local high schools, colleges and universities, and tribal colleges to attract candidates
- Providing student-worker and intern positions
- Providing implicit bias training for court employees and judicial officers

Potential future actions

- Post career opportunities in more diverse and creative locations
- Host more student-focused events with various community groups

2. Bail, fees, and fines; socioeconomic barriers

Issue

The concerns include inconsistent and different treatment based on race in bail practices, as well as socioeconomic barriers, resulting in difficulty in making bail, paying for drug testing or evaluations, and paying fines. Community members cited the repetitive cycle that low-income people can fall into of failing to pay fines, having a warrant issued or a driver's license suspended, being arrested, and losing work time or a job, resulting in incurring further legal trouble and expenses—exacerbating the cycle of poverty and legal ramifications. Community members reported that too many people are incarcerated and too many people plead guilty because of lack of money, presumably for legal costs. Community

members discussed lack of access to legal representation if a person is not eligible for public defense but can't afford an attorney.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included studying bail practices to ensure there is not a disparate impact, and posting a blank bail evaluation form on the public website so the public knows what the courts take into consideration. Socioeconomic barriers recommendations included creating fine/fee forgiveness programs; offering warrant forgiveness days; working with attorneys and Legal Aid to enhance access and information about services; performing analysis of debt load from total costs (fines, surcharges, etc.); and using more community service to offset fines and fees.

Courts' responses

- Providing implicit bias training for court employees and judicial officers
- Develop, implement, and publish information on the website regarding the validated pretrial bail evaluation tool known as the Minnesota Pretrial Assessment Tool (MNPAT)
- Updating the administrative order delegating release authority to the jail and Project Remand prior to the first appearance in court
- Engaging with county justice partners in the Adult Detention Initiative, and focusing on only holding persons in pretrial custody when there is a public safety risk or significant risk of nonappearance
- Expanding self-help centers and resources statewide
- Providing information on Legal Aid and other resources
- Continuing to promote warrant resolution days
- Developing a warrant resolution walk-in process, beginning with lower-level offenses
- Supporting expungement clinics
- Participating with stakeholders in a housing court workgroup
- Developing a panel of attorneys providing pro bono or low bono services
- Securing an Ignition Interlock grant to provide financial assistance
- Supporting Ask-a-Lawyer and law clinic activities
- Implementing a diversion calendar to include cases that affect defendants' criminal records, resulting in collateral damage such as loss of housing or driver's license suspension

Potential future actions

- Perform a study to understand the comprehensive cost of fines, fees, surcharges, probation fees, jail fees, etc., to help inform ways to reduce the impact on low-income communities
- Investigate potential elimination of driver's license suspensions when there is a failure to pay court-imposed fines
- Continue to study bail practices to ensure no disparate impact
- Explore cheaper alternatives to current drug testing while on pretrial release

3. Difficulties regarding court appearances

Issues

Community members described difficulties around court appearances and engaging with the court system—including transportation issues, unnecessary travel, and limited courthouse hours. They cited insufficient transportation to court facilities, probation, and detention, including in rural areas. They expressed that transportation issues are particularly difficult when people engaging with the courts do not have a valid driver’s license. Community members cited as challenges excessive time away from work or family and associated costs for travel and court appearances.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included telephonic or ITV appearances for certain court proceedings; expanding satellite court locations, in addition to traditional courthouses; improving signage for parking areas and in the courthouses; and expanding court hours to include evenings or weekends.

Courts’ responses

- Acquiring a grant for transportation to court location for criminal matters
- Increasing use of telephonic, ITV, or computer-based appearances
- Holding truancy court at local schools
- Exploring non-courthouse locations for hearings

Potential future actions

- Explore transportation solutions, including alternative modes of transportation to court in the absence of reasonable public transportation, and explore possible seed money or support for grants to implement solutions
- Provide information about transportation options
- Help smaller courthouses lacking employees to tap into larger courthouses for support in initiatives such as treatment courts
- Improve calendaring/check-in system to minimize wait times
- Explore additional transportation grants

4. Education for Judicial Branch employees and judicial officers

Issues

Community members expressed concerns about a perceived lack of cultural awareness, bias, and that judges and employees need to be more understanding, humble, and tolerant of racial and societal differences. Some communities, in particular, raised concerns regarding lack of understanding of Native American cultures, including social conditions, historical trauma, and the meaning and importance of family. Concerns were also raised about a lack of awareness of immigrants’ experience with respect to religion, cultural values, and legal rights.

Community members also reported a lack of understanding by the courts regarding the trauma of being involved in the legal system or having family members incarcerated. The need for the courts to be more involved in and relatable to the community was also identified. Community members also expressed the desire for a bridge between the courts and the community. Community members raised concerns about improving customer service.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included holding periodic court employee trainings on the topics of appreciating and engaging with culturally diverse court users, implicit bias, cultural competence, and the effect of poverty. Specifically with respect to the Native American community, recommendations included training on American Indian history, cultural practices, and historical trauma; recruiting tribal judges to the Committee for Equality and Justice; engaging tribal elders; offering culturally-specific treatment programs; and increasing court awareness of family support for defendants to reduce flight risk. Recommendations also included videotaping and critiquing judges on the bench; inviting community members to speak at judicial education events; holding regularly scheduled and more community listening events, with a focus on poverty and institutional barriers; increasing judicial involvement in the community; and improving customer service.

Courts' responses

- Development of quarterly “Cultural Perspectives” trainings for judicial officers and court employees on topics related to diversity and inclusion
- Development of “Why Diversity Matters” training open to all court employees, and included as a part of required New Employee Orientation
- Children’s Justice Initiative courses on the Indian Child Welfare Act
- District and branch-wide trainings on mental health, diversity and inclusion, implicit bias, and the effects of trauma on court users
- Training for judicial officers on the effect of probation
- Education for judicial officers on the Holocaust and the Nazi German legal system
- Yearly participation in the National Consortium for Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts annual conference
- Training on the effects of trauma in wellness courts and culturally-specific treatment options
- Education on historical and contemporary factors influencing substance abuse in the Native American community
- Training on the Indian Child Welfare Act, including information on historical trauma and cultural differences
- Hiring of community liaison to work with county, courts, and tribal nations
- Training by State of Minnesota Native American Ombudsman
- Education by tribal leaders on cultural issues
- One or more Community Dialogues in every judicial district
- Outreach events with community organizations (YMCA, schools, Dorothy Day Center, etc.)
- Judicial outreach trips to Minnesota tribal reservations
- Community dinners

- Judicial Branch Information Booth at Minnesota State Fair
- Raising the tribal flag of the Fond du Lac Band in the Carlton County Courthouse, and of the White Earth Nation and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe at the Hennepin County Juvenile Justice Center
- Employees in outreach positions at courts to improve community relations

Potential future actions

- Follow recommendation made by Committee for Equality and Justice Education Subcommittee to include culturally competent community resource training for court employees
- Develop topic-specific outreach presentations for judges to use
- Explore holding court at tribal community center
- Continued training on cultural awareness
- Judges connecting with underrepresented youth groups to provide mentorship and education
- Judges working with Teen Challenge to bring more students into the courts
- Visiting neighborhood groups and events on National Night Out
- Judges performing service projects within communities

5. Education about the legal system for the community

Issues

Community members expressed a need for greater understanding of the legal system. They reported that people often don't understand what to expect at court, what has already happened, or why. The mechanics of judicial proceedings—getting notice, how to check in, how to get an interpreter, how to pay fines, where to go, how long hearings may take, how to prepare for court—can be challenging. Concerns were also raised about not understanding Minnesota law or how to get help and limited access to Self-Help Center resources.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included creating a more navigable online experience for users seeking information about what to expect when they are summoned to court, extending Self-Help Center hours, and creating a 24-hour online help desk. Community members recommended providing better information in advance and signage regarding court proceedings, such as where and how to check in, basic court decorum rules (e.g., no children in the courtroom, no hats, cell phones, etc.), how to get an interpreter, how to pay fines, and where to get help. They recommended implementing a system for text or email notification of required court appearances, providing realistic timeframes for how long court appearances might take (for parking, child care, work issues), and creating educational programs (maybe in recreation/community centers) regarding key legal topics (e.g., domestic abuse, elder abuse). Recommendations included increased use of social media and connections with community organizations and libraries to connect people with self-help centers and court-related educational resources.

Courts' responses

- [“Going to Court in Minnesota”](#) videos in Hmong, Spanish, Somali, and American Sign Language
- Expanding the Branch’s social media presence, including Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- Expanding self-help centers and resources
- Employing multilingual court employees at self-help centers
- Conducting outreach events with community organizations
- Improving communications and publications
- Expanding email and text notifications of court dates
- Implementing processes to address customer experience, including revising court documents to make them more understandable
- Using a virtual tour of the court system developed by a partner agency
- Holding court hearings at schools and tribal community centers
- Collaborating with tribal communities on a program to increase awareness of elder abuse

Potential future actions

- Improve calendaring/check-in system to minimize wait times
- Create tip sheet on what to expect in court
- Improve signage on what to expect (sequence of events, length of proceedings, etc.)
- Assess the order in which cases are called before a judge
- Partner with libraries to disseminate information
- Identify existing community organizations within districts to collaborate on shared goals
- Continue use of social media to promote outreach and engagement events

6. Immigration

Issues

Community members expressed concern about a lack of understanding of whether what happens in state court will affect federal immigration proceedings, as well as a perception that the state courts are connected to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Community recommendations

Community members recommended education for judges and court employees relating to immigration and deportation, and training for the bench and bar on problems faced by noncitizens.

Courts' responses

- Provided judicial education for judges, entitled, “The Relevance of Immigration Status in Minnesota State Court Proceedings,” and “Immigration and Family Law”
- Bar association educational presentation to bench and bar on consequences in criminal actions, federal immigration and deportation proceedings, and ICE holds

Potential future actions

- Provide training for all staff and judicial officers

7. Language and cultural barriers

Issues

Community members expressed that language can be a barrier at every step, from not understanding rules, to not understanding a ticket or charge, to not being able to communicate in the courtroom. They cited problems with interpreter use, including cultural differences with interpreters, a lack of trust with outside interpreters who are not known to the local community, and concern that interpreters might spread rumors.

Community recommendations

Community members recommended that courts increase their bilingual court employees; that, in cross-cultural matters, courts have not only a language interpreter but also a “cultural broker” to assist in translating differing views and beliefs of the parties; and that courts have a Somali greeter.

Recommendations were made on providing more information about translating/interpreting and training to increase trust, ensuring that interpreters are available at first appearances, and improving interpreting to include not just translation of words spoken but also the meaning or context of the words.

Courts' responses

- Provided judicial education on “Language & Cultural Barriers Impacting Interpreters in the Courtroom”
- Expanding Court Interpreter Program resources
- Recruiting and hiring more interpreters
- Holding interpreter career fair for outreach
- Ethics training for the court interpreters
- Coordinating with schools to provide intern/shadowing opportunities for new interpreters
- Installing electronic kiosks with multiple language options for navigating court information and frequently asked questions
- Expanding availability of court forms in more languages
- Providing justice partners with a webpage including court-interpreter resources
- Increased awareness of deaf and hard-of-hearing court users and communication resources
- Changed interpreter complaint process to no longer require that a complaint be made in writing
- Consolidated interpreter scheduling to help ensure adherence to court rules and hiring of the most qualified interpreter for hearings and trials

Potential future actions

- Career fair/outreach to recruit interpreters

8. Diversion and sentencing

Issue

Community members cited the impact of fines on economically-challenged persons, and concerns about difficult and sometimes unexpected collateral consequences incurred because of court proceedings, including loss of housing, jobs, eligibility to vote, and driving privileges. Community members also discussed the onerousness of probation; the impact of warrants for probation violations; high incarceration rates; and the failure to consider mental health issues, language barriers, or developmental disabilities when deciding whether to incarcerate.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included evaluating probation practices (time and conditions, warrant practices for violations, and more opportunities for sentence to service), and including culturally specific diversion programs, community diversion programs, and juvenile diversion programs.

Courts' responses

- Expanding diversion calendars
- Maintaining and creating more treatment and specialty courts
- Examining use of warrants for probation violations
- Meeting with justice partners about early discharge and limitation of conditions on probation
- Tracking whether people ask to have sentences executed
- Investigating impact on driver's licenses of nonpayment of court fines
- Working with tribes on diversion programs
- Establishing joint jurisdiction treatment courts
- Setting up a truancy diversion program, increasing communication with parents, and developing an expedited truancy probation program

Potential future actions

- Collaborate with agencies running mentoring programs involving adult offenders

9. Jury pools

Issue

Community members cited the need for more diverse jurors that reflect the race/ethnicity of the person standing trial.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included encouraging Somali U.S. citizens to take action that would include them in jury source lists, considering additional sources for summoning jurors, and not automatically excluding persons 70 years or older from jury duty.

Courts' responses

- Following up with individuals when summonses are sent out

- Sending bus passes with jury summonses
- Community education regarding jury composition and how to become a juror
- Exploring additional sources for jury pools, including discussions with tribes regarding options to increase American Indian representation
- Updating language in all variable jury summonses to make clear the need for all to complete their questionnaires and show up for service
- Providing training to court staff, entitled, “Providing Language Access for Courthouse Customers”

Potential future actions

- Study options to increase juror pools

10. Juvenile court process

Issue

Community members cited a need for improvement in the juvenile court process, specifically regarding the transport of some juveniles in shackles, and expressed a need for mentoring juveniles.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included consideration of backgrounds for out-of-home placement, letting children (and not just their lawyers) tell their side of the story, and implementing or working with other organizations to implement mentoring programs.

Courts’ responses

- Working with county authorities to develop policies limiting use of shackles in transporting juveniles
- Engaging with community organizations regarding mentoring

11. Mental health

Issue

Community members raised concerns that defendants are not getting needed mental health evaluations and are inappropriately incarcerated.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included treatment court and mental health referrals, courts being more responsive to Rule 20 issues, and doing more to partner with community and/or drug treatment programs.

Courts’ responses

- Providing judicial education for judges, entitled, “Considerations Before Ordering a Rule 20”
- Expansion of treatment courts

- Custody defendants getting short-form evaluations at time of bail evaluation
- Using employee psychologists for consistency in quality, availability, and cost
- Working on Rule 20 initiative and diagnostic assessments tool
- Joint jurisdictional DWI/treatment courts

12. Bias and fairness

Issue

Community members raised concerns about bias based on race/ethnicity, gender/sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other protected classes.

Community recommendations

Community members recommended training on implicit bias and that judges and court employees continue talking about the importance of checking in on their own biases.

Courts' responses

- “Cultural Perspectives” trainings for judicial officers and employees, including the ongoing topics of Implicit Bias, Micro-inequities, Cultural Intelligence, Implicit Bias in the Hiring Process, and beyond
- Implicit bias programming at judicial conferences
- Creation of an Implicit Bias Bench Card
- Implemented pretrial-release tool and related training
- Studying the Minnesota Sentencing Commission Probation Revocation Report to identify trends and decision points at which change can be made to reduce disparities with American Indians/other populations of color
- Sponsoring webinar on implicit bias and the struggle for racial justice
- ICWA training for judicial officers and court employees

13. Perception of the justice system

Issue

Community members reported concerns that judges react unfairly to certain types of cases (e.g., DWI), that the courts are allied with prosecutors, and that defendants are coerced to plead guilty.

Community recommendations

Community members recommended more collaboration with tribal courts, and that judges learn more about the programs to which they refer court users, that they stay with the same case over time, and that they receive more training when they go to a new division.

Courts' responses

- Attending “We Are All Criminals” training sessions

- Training for judges on procedural fairness
- ICWA trainings addressing intergenerational trauma and mistrust of the judicial system
- Evaluation of data around incarceration rates of Native Americans
- Working with tribes on wellness courts and developing opportunities for programming

14. Family cases

Issue

Community members reported that family court was too difficult to understand and navigate, especially with multiple appearances and childcare needs. They expressed a lack of understanding of court users' backgrounds and the issues they face and the need for more support for families affected by incarceration.

Community recommendations

Recommendations included making family court and parenting/co-parenting courses available and offering more information on legal resources and Early Neutral Evaluation. They recommended that courts consider culture when making decisions concerning children.

Courts' responses

- Created the Provider Availability and Scheduling System (PASS) to bring consistent information to litigants, increase the availability of Early Neutral Evaluation providers in underserved counties, and include information on available languages other than English
- Established a Family Court Workgroup to address issues including case assignments, appointment of guardians ad litem for disabled adults, appointment of counsel in non-paternity cases, and a trauma-based approach in juvenile and family court matters
- Implemented a Moderated Settlement Conference Program to facilitate dispute resolution in the later stages of family-court cases
- Provided judicial education on: "Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities"; domestic abuse and harassment restraining orders; the impact of domestic abuse in custody cases; issues in high-conflict cases and family reunification; a trauma-based approach in juvenile and family court matters; attachment and development in early childhood and parenting time; and "Early Case Management/Early Neutral Evaluation: The Future of Family Case Resolution"
- Increasing acceptance of courses across district and county lines so that litigants in each area have more equal access to parent education courses and choices
- Approved additional online Parent Education courses, making access better for those counties with no local in-person courses
- Viewing of movie, "Resilience"
- Training for court employees on trauma and supporting families
- Expanding self-help services
- Partnering with legal services for no-cost, on-site, day-of legal representation/consultation

- Created rosters and sliding fee scales for early neutral evaluation to bring live-ENE provider resources to all rural counties that had no local court-supported ENE
- Developed a Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Bench Guide for judicial officers
- Creating a domestic violence advocacy network
- Attempting to simplify the Initial Case Management Conference process

General Observations

1

The **engagement of community members** across the state has been impressive. Many community members have taken the time to participate in Community Dialogues, and they have provided insightful feedback about fairness and access to justice, as well as thoughtful and helpful recommendations for improvement. Community input is invaluable in identifying and helping to solve problems of unfairness in our courts, and the courts owe a debt of gratitude to all of the community members who have participated in the Community Dialogues.

2

It is inspiring to see how much **good work** is being done by the courts across the state on issues of equality and fairness. From open courthouse events, recruitment activities and career days, warrant forgiveness and expungement events, education and training, development of Self-Help Center resources, publications and communications, the creation of topic-specific bench cards, and more, judicial districts and the Minnesota Judicial Branch as a whole have energetically implemented many responses to problems stemming from inequality and unfairness.

3

Engagement with the community remains critical, and EJsCs may find that other forms of Community Dialogues or other types of **community outreach** are more effective means in engaging the community.

4

While many common concerns about fairness and equality appear across the judicial districts, districts also have their own specific issues and challenges. Because of these differences, **statewide answers are not enough**. Individual EJsCs remain the critical force for addressing equal justice issues in their districts.

5

Issues of inequality and unfairness often reach beyond the scope of the courts. While the courts can and should take action over things they control, the courts also must be active participants with **other community and justice partners** to achieve fairness and equality in the justice system as a whole.

Next Steps

This report is a foundation for creating a framework for identifying and addressing equal justice issues raised by the communities we serve. This report will be used by the Committee for Equality and Justice and its subcommittees to drill down into the identified issues and formulate specific recommendations for assessment, action, and reevaluation of how we are addressing equal justice issues. Finally, we hope this report will prompt broader discussions among the Judicial Branch, justice partners, and the community on the important issues of equality and justice.

Other Resources

- [Committee for Equality and Justice Public webpage](#) includes Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report and Community Dialogue reports.