History and Mission

The Nebraska Minority Justice Committee is a unique statewide collaboration that works to develop and implement just and sustainable policy reforms that will not only improve the system of justice but will also strengthen public trust and confidence in our laws and court system. The Committee is a joint effort of the Nebraska State Bar Association and the Nebraska Supreme Court, appointed by the Supreme Court in May of 2003 in response to a Task Force’s two-year investigation of racial and ethnic bias and discrimination in Nebraska’s justice system. The mission of the Committee is to achieve three primary aims:

- Address racial disparities in both the juvenile and adult justice systems
- Ensure equal access to justice
- Increase the diversity of Nebraska’s judicial workforce and legal profession

The Committee is pleased to share these brief descriptions of the progress it made in 2006.

Chairs and staff of the MJC: Sitting: Hon. John Gerrard, Nebraska Supreme Court and Co-Chair of the MJC. Standing, from left to right: Jane Schoenike, Executive Director of the Nebraska State Bar Association; Liz Neeley, PhD, Project Director of the MJC and Linda Crump, Office of Equity Access and Diversity UNL, Co-Chair of the MJC.
Representative Juries Project

The MJC was awarded a $30,000 grant from Woods Charitable Fund to develop, implement and evaluate a statewide educational campaign designed to thank jurors for their contribution to the justice system and to promote the representation of people from every ethnicity, race, religion and economic background on our juries. The campaign targeted Nebraska’s most diverse counties and utilized a three-pronged campaign to promote jury service, consisting of meetings with minority community organizations, dissemination of written materials regarding the jury process, and a targeted radio campaign. The campaign visited: Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, Lexington, Madison and Scottsbluff counties. The final two campaign destinations, Lancaster and Douglas counties, added an additional component; “law day” events at local minority community centers featuring: a free legal clinic (sponsored by the Volunteer Lawyers Project), information about jury service and an opportunity to register to vote, information about applying to and attending law school, and information about careers in the court system.

Access to Justice Issue of The Nebraska Lawyer

In May of 2006 the Committee co-published a special issue on “Access to Justice” in The Nebraska Lawyer, educating attorneys on: immigration issues, working with non-English speaking populations, legal services for the poor, and other factors affecting the public’s access to the justice system.

Uniform Juror Qualification Form

The MJC was responsible for developing Nebraska’s uniform juror qualification form and obtaining legislative access to juror qualification forms for the purpose of research. The uniform juror qualification form will allow researchers to determine the extent to which the current juror compilation process systematically excludes racial and ethnic minorities.
Criminal and Juvenile Justice

Assigned Counsel Fee Study
At the request of the Supreme Court, the MJC undertook a statewide assessment of fee structures for assigned counsel in misdemeanor and felony cases. The results of their examination, coupled with existing national guidelines for indigent defense systems, are the basis for the Committee’s recommendations regarding standards on the qualifications, compensation, training, caseloads and workloads for each type of indigent defense system in Nebraska.

Improvement of Data Collection
The MJC developed an initiative to address the lack of data on race and ethnicity gathered by the court system, and is working for a uniform definition of race and ethnicity across justice system entities.

Diversity in the Profession and Court System

Second Annual Legal Diversity Summit
On October 6, 2006 the MJC hosted Nebraska’s 2nd Annual Legal Diversity Summit. The Summit featured Harvard Law Professor, Charles Ogletree and provided informational interviews between regional law students of color and Nebraska legal employers. The Summit was well attended and successful in providing law students of color from the region with new knowledge, contacts and an interest in seeking employment in Nebraska after law school. The Summit also provided Nebraska’s legal employers with new ways of understanding the value of a diverse workforce and strategies for recruiting and retaining attorneys of color.

Supporting Law School Initiatives
In 2006, the Minority Justice Committee once again supported the University of Nebraska College of Law Pre-Law Institute, a summer program which provides an introduction to legal study for students who are traditionally underrepresented in law school. The Committee also provided a minority law student scholarship to Creighton University School of Law.

Nebraska Legal Diversity Website
The popularity of the Nebraska Legal Diversity Website (www.nelegaldiversity.org) continues to grow. The website showcases the growing diversity of Nebraska while providing resources, discussion forums, tools for legal employers, and job postings from firms and organizations actively seeking minority applicants.
Barristers’ Ball 2006

On May 20, 2006, the NSBA’s Charitable Funds, Inc. hosted the Second Annual Barristers’ Ball at the Doubletree Hotel in Omaha. The proceeds of the Ball were earmarked to support the projects of the Nebraska Minority Justice Committee. More specifically, the proceeds will support:

**Diversity in the Profession**—The expansion and continued operation of The Annual Nebraska Legal Diversity Summit and the establishment of minority law school scholarships to Nebraska Law Schools and for LSAT prep courses.

**Removing Language Barriers**—The continued translation of court and probation forms into a bilingual format to increase meaningful access to justice for limited- and non-English speakers.

**Jury Research and Juror Education**—Reform and education efforts to ensure that Nebraska’s juries are representative of their communities.

**Visionary Awards**

In addition to a festive evening of dining, music and live and silent auctions, the Barristers’ Ball presented numerous Visionary Awards in recognition of individuals’ vision and commitment to promoting diversity in Nebraska’s legal profession and improving the administration of justice. Award recipients included:

- The University of Nebraska College of Law Summer Pre-Law Institute
- The Bilingual Bail-Bond Rights Advisement Project
- The Original Chairs of the Minority and Justice Task Force
- The Founder of The American Indian Outreach Initiative
- The Original Founders of the Midlands Bar Association, and
- The Legislature’s Judiciary Committee from 2003-2005

Priority Projects

The Minority Justice Committee recently underwent a strategic planning process to determine its future direction. Our priority projects for the coming years include:

- An initiative to provide uniform bilingual forms and documents to the court and probation systems
- Exploring policies to ensure that there are not barriers for non-English speakers and low income individuals from participating in diversion
- Improving access to legal services
- Developing a minority law school scholarship
- Partnering to establish mock trial programs in high schools with significant minority populations
- Providing model polices to law firms on: hiring, assignment of work, promotion, and evaluation of employees
- Introducing policies aimed at reducing disproportionate minority detention
- Working towards the adoption of a uniform definition of race and ethnicity across justice system entities
- Establishing a non-monetary system of bond
Raising Awareness

The Committee hopes that continual media coverage and community outreach will bring broad public exposure to these important issues. Members of the MJC have met with and made presentations to numerous groups in 2006 including: University of Nebraska College of Law, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Bias in the Courts, Nebraska’s Clerks of the District Court, the Nebraska Association of County Officials, and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. The MJC has also reached out to the community through the media via radio interviews, newspaper articles, and magazines and journals for a complete list of publications visit: www.nebar.com/publicinfo/minority_justice.htm

Feedback and Questions

For more information on the Nebraska Minority Justice Committee visit www.nebar.com/publicinfo/minority_justice.htm or call (402) 475-7091. The MJC is at the beginning stages of a long-term effort. While it may take years to fully implement many of the recommendations, the Committee is developing long-term plans to promote change. Interest in the Minority Justice Committee’s mission and activities is appreciated and encouraged.


Standing (from left to right): Cecilia Huerta, Riko Bishop, Darrell Fisher, Hon. Vernon Daniels, Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, David Stickman, Alan Tomkins, Hon. John Irwin, Mohummed Sadden, Carlos Monzón, Anna Williams Shavers, Jim Rembolt, Judi gaiashkibos, Mark Young, and José Soto.

Members of the Minority Justice Committee

Co-Chairs:

Linda Crump, Equity, Access & Diversity Programs UNL
Hon. John Gerrard, Nebraska Supreme Court

Committee:

Daphne Aronson, Diversity Officer, Kutak Rock
Hon. Edna Atkins, Douglas County Court
Valorie Bendixen, Clerk of the District Court for Hall County
Judy Beutler, Administrative Office of the Courts
Riko Bishop, Attorney at Law
Dean Patrick Borchers, Creighton University School of Law
Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, State Probation Administrator
Hon. Vernon Daniels, Separate Juvenile Court Douglas County
Darrell Fisher, Lt. Col., Nebraska State Patrol
Judi gaiashkibos, Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs
John Grant, Attorney at Law
Anne Hobbs, Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission
Cecilia Huerta, Nebraska Mexican American Commission
Hon. John Irwin, Nebraska Court of Appeals
Dennis Keefe, Lancaster County Public Defender
Kate Mahern, Milton Abrahams Legal Clinic
Natalie Malmberg, Certified Court Interpreter
Monica Miles-Steffens, Judicial Branch Education
Carlos Monzón, Attorney at Law
D. Milo Mumgaard, Nebraska Appleseed Center
Liz Neeley, PhD, University of Nebraska Public Policy Center
Hon. Marlon Polk, Douglas County District Court
Jim Rembolt, Attorney at Law
Harold Rock, Attorney at Law
Mohummed Sadden, Attorney at Law
Jane Schoenike, Nebraska State Bar Association
José Soto, Southeast Community College
Hon. Robert Steinke, Platte County District Court
David Stickman, Federal Public Defender
Alan Tomkins, Public Policy Center
Hon. Ken Vampola, Dodge County Court
Terry Waite, Attorney at Law
Janice Walker, State Court Administrator
Thomas Warren, Omaha Police Department
Linda Willard, Nebraska Attorney Generals Office
Anna Williams Shavers, University of Nebraska College of Law
Sherman Willis, Attorney at Law
Dean Steven Willborn, University of Nebraska College of Law
Mark Young, Hall County Attorney

— Equal Justice Before the Courts —
Support the MJC

The MJC is supported in part by the Nebraska State Bar Association’s Charitable Funds, Inc. (www.nebar.com/nsbainfo/otherorqs/cfi/index.htm). To support the future efforts of the Minority Justice Committee, please make a tax deductible contribution to NSBA Charitable Funds, Inc. today!

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