

Committee on Fairness in the Criminal Justice System holds public hearings

On October 22, 2015 and November 13, 2015 the Committee on Fairness in the Criminal Justice System, held a series of public informational hearings on initiatives to reduce crime and increase racial equity in the criminal justice system. The Committee comprised of prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement, community leaders and academics has been charged with examining the causes of the disparity between the percentage of Delaware's prison population who are black and the percentage of Delaware's overall population who are black and proposing ways to reduce those disparities and improve public safety.

Members of the Committee — led by co-chairs Thomas J. Allingham, Esq. and Bartholomew J. Dalton, Esq., along with panel chairs Rick Deadwyler, Jr.; Yasser A. Payne, Ph.D.; Thomas Foley Esq.; Superior Court Judge Ferris Wharton; Panel Chair Colm F. Connolly Esq. — heard national and local experts' presentations on Alternatives to Incarceration, Bail and Pre-Trial Detention, Charging, Plea Bargaining and Sentencing Decisions, Policing Strategies and Root Causes of Racial Disparities.

Prior to these informational hearings, experts from the Equal Justice Initiative and the University of Pennsylvania Law School's Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice and the University of Delaware prepared and submitted reports to the Committee for their review. These reports included information on reforms used elsewhere to reduce crime and increase racial equity that might be considered in Delaware. At the informational hearings, Committee members were able to question the experts about the information provided in their reports and engage the experts in a dialogue about their research and recommendations.

The informational hearings were the first part of a two-part public hearing process. The second part of the process involves the Committee hearing from the public. Members of the public who were not able to attend the informational hearings can watch the videos of the hearings and read the expert reports online, to provide the Committee feedback on the experts' testimony and recommendations.

Full videos of the hearings, and the written reports submitted by the experts, are available on the Access to Justice website at <http://courts.delaware.gov/Supreme/access.stm>.

A sign-up form to reserve a spot to speak at the public forums is available at the Access to Justice website at <http://courts.delaware.gov/Supreme/accessform.stm>. Speakers at the public forms will be limited to five minutes each.

Those who are not able to attend one of the public forums – or are unable to address the Committee due to time constraints – can still share their thoughts with the Committee through that same sign-up form. The deadline to submit comments to the Committee is Dec. 18, 2015

The public forums will be held in the evenings from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on the following dates and at the following locations:

- Dec. 1 in Georgetown at First State Community Action Agency, 308 N. Railroad Avenue
- Dec. 2 in Middletown at Middletown High, 120 Silver Lake Road
- Dec. 8 in Wilmington at Howard High, 401 E. 12th Street
- Dec. 9 in Dover at William Henry Middle School, 65 Carver Road

Following the conclusion of the public hearings, the members of the Fairness Committee will draft a plan of action that will be presented to the Delaware Supreme Court.

The Fairness Committee is a part of the Access to Justice Commission. The Access to Justice Commission was created by the Delaware Supreme Court in 2014 with the broad mandate to undertake the task of examining the justice system to identify any barriers to access to justice that may exist, and to develop recommendations designed to reduce or eliminate those barriers.

**For more information, please contact:
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