

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SEPTEMBER 23, 2016**

**Study on the role of race in the
Delaware criminal justice system released**

Following through on recommendations issued by criminal justice experts from Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Institute and the Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice during a series of public hearings on criminal justice reform held last fall, the Delaware Access to Justice Commission's Committee on Fairness in the Criminal Justice System made public today a detailed, independent study that looks into the issue of racial disparities in the Delaware criminal justice system.

The Fairness Committee, comprised of a cross-section of the Delaware Bar, community and business leaders, academia and members of the public, is charged with examining the causes of racial disparities in our state's system of criminal justice, and with trying to find ways to make our criminal justice system more equitable and improve public safety.

"This is an important study and one that will be key to the Fairness Committee's work evaluating possible reforms to the Delaware criminal justice system. A study like this ensures that we are working from provable, real-world facts not anecdote or speculation," said Bartholomew J. Dalton, co-chair of the Delaware Access to Justice Commission's Fairness Committee.

The study by John M. MacDonald, Ph.D. and Ellen A. Donnelly, Ph. D., from the University of Pennsylvania Department of Criminology conducted at the request of the Fairness Committee, involved a year-long statistical review of all adults arrested and charged with a criminal offense in Delaware between 2012 and 2014 to determine the extent to which race played a role in whether an arrestee is sentenced to incarceration and the length of an incarceration sentence.

While the authors caution that the study does not identify exact causes for any observed disparities, factors such as the offense charged at arrest, pretrial detention and contextual factors such as criminal history appear to be important contributors to differences in incarceration sentences. The study says that the results suggest that justice system interactions after arrest plays little role in explaining the difference in incarceration rates. The study points to areas for further exploration on issues such as pretrial detention and focuses for possible reform including sentencing policies and the weight to which current charges, violation of pre-existing court orders, and criminal history are factored into sentencing decisions.

"This was a great opportunity to do a thorough analysis of discretion in the criminal justice process in Delaware and working on the study was particularly satisfying because the results will have a direct impact on and inform policy," said Professor MacDonald. "I think it speaks volumes that you have people in Delaware — from across the spectrum including the courts, prosecution, defense and the public — sitting at the same table trying to think about ways to reform the system."

At the University of Pennsylvania, Professor MacDonald primarily focuses on the study of crime and violence along with race and ethnic disparities in criminal justice and the effect of public policy responses on crime. In 2012 he received the David N. Kershaw Award for Distinguished Contributions in the Field of Public Policy Analysis from the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management. Dr. Donnelly is a Lecturer in the Department of Criminology and focuses on American politics, crime and punishment and quantitative methods. Her research has examined policies addressing racial inequity in the U.S. adult and juvenile justice systems.

The authors presented their findings to the Fairness Committee and members of the public at a meeting on September 23, 2016 in a report titled, "Evaluating the Role of Race in Criminal Justice Adjudications in Delaware." A panel of criminal justice experts including Karen F. Parker, Ph.D., of the University of Delaware; Paul Heaton, Ph.D., of the University of Pennsylvania; Ray Paternoster, Ph.D., of the University of Maryland; and Moderator James Nolan, Ph.D., of the West Virginia University discussed the results and explored areas for further study.

The report is available online at the Delaware Access to Justice website at <http://courts.delaware.gov/supreme/access.aspx>.

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