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A National Campaign to Ensure the Racial and Ethnic Fairness of America's State Courts

Race & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts

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Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the *Race and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts* e-newsletter. The newsletter will provide updates on the progress of the [National Campaign to Ensure Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts](#), as well as highlight state court efforts across the country to address racial and ethnic fairness.

If you are a primary contact for the National Campaign, please share the newsletter with others in your state interested in learning more about our efforts to address racial and ethnic fairness in the courts.

National Consortium on Race and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts (NCREFC) Convenes Annual Meeting

The [National Consortium on Race and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts](#) held its 19th [Annual Meeting](#) in Brooklyn, New York, May 2-5. Over 200 attendees, faculty, speakers, and panelists convened for this year's theme of "Saving our Children: Justice and Fair Treatment of Youth in the Courts." Jeremy Travis, president of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, provided an excellent keynote address focusing on "Race, Crime, and Justice." Breakout sessions covered topics such as Cultural and Language

Barriers to Justice; Alternatives to Incarceration and Mentoring Programs; Teen Violence and the Media; Collateral Consequences for Youth; People of Color in the Profession; Innovative Elementary and High School Programs Focusing on Gangs, the Law, the Courts, and the Community; and Disproportionate Number of Minority Youth in the Family and Criminal Court Systems. A highlight of the conference was the opportunity to spend a morning observing one of New York's problem-solving courts.

Promising Programs

The [National Campaign's database](#) includes promising programs and practices to achieve racial and ethnic fairness in the following key areas:

- diverse and representative state judicial workforces;
- fair and unbiased behaviors on the part of judges, court staff, attorneys, and others subject to court authority in the courthouse;
- comprehensive, system-wide improvements to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in criminal, domestic violence, juvenile, and abuse and neglect cases;
- the availability of timely and high-quality services to improve access to the courts for limited-English-proficient persons; and
- diverse and representative juries.

The database includes information from 34 states and 2 U. S. territories. If you are a primary contact and have not completed your state's survey, there is still time to participate. Please contact [Pam Casey](#) if you have

questions.

Each issue of the newsletter will feature programs available in the National Campaign's database. In this issue we are spotlighting a program from Hawaii to ensure the availability of services for limited-English-proficient persons and a program from Connecticut to ensure fair and unbiased behaviors on the part of judges in the court.

Hawaii: Services for Limited-English-Proficient Persons

Hawaii's [Supreme Court Committee on Court Interpreters](#) includes judges, attorneys, legislators, and representatives from community organizations and government agencies appointed by the chief justice to three-year, staggered terms. The committee, established in 1995, is charged with developing and implementing projects to promote language access to the courts for individuals who lack or have limited skills in English. Among its accomplishments are policies for interpreted proceedings in Hawaii ; a mandatory, basic court-interpreter-ethics exam; a court-interpreter fee schedule and payment guidelines; court-interpreter-training opportunities; and development of a court-interpreter-certification program to be implemented in 2007.

The state liaison chose this program as a promising practice in part due to the "low cost, ease of replication, and breadth of impact involved in the creation and maintenance of such a committee."

Connecticut: Fair and Unbiased Behaviors

Connecticut's "Handling the Geographical Area (Criminal Court) in a Culturally Sensitive Manner" is a full-day program embedded in the mandatory three-week PreBench Orientation program. New trial court judges engage in a roundtable discussion led by experienced judges about presiding over criminal matters in a culturally sensitive manner. This program is based on a

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presentation given at the 2006 Connecticut Judges Institute that “included an examination of the impact of race, ethnicity, and language in the areas of bail and sentencing.” A follow-up session is held four months after the orientation to address any questions and issues that arose during the new judges' first few months of sitting on the bench. The state liaison chose this program as a promising practice because it ensures that all new judges are educated specifically about the impact of their actions and demeanor while on the bench; has the potential of positively affecting interactions with parties, jurors, the bar, and the public throughout the judge's career; and is inexpensive to implement given it is part of the existing PreBench Orientation.



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