

**Commission on Racial & Ethnic Disparity in
the Criminal Justice System
November 17, 2008 Meeting**

MINUTES

Persons in Attendance:

Judge Harper (Chair), Deborah Fuller (Judicial), Andrew Moseley (BOPP), Donald Green (AAG), Ann-Marie DeGraffenreidt (DCF – BJS), Judith Rossi (OCSA), Hakima Bey-Coon (OVA), Jeanne Milstein (OCA), Fran Carino (OCSA), Glenn Cassis (AAAC), Werner Oyanadel (LPRAC), Gary Roberge (CSSD), Kay Berris, Pat Hynes (DOC), Representative Bill Dyson, Shoshanna Silverberg, Tracey Gove, Katherine Hypolite, Paul Fitzgerald (Chiefs of Police), Shawna Johnson, Barbara J. Lynch (DPS), Andrew Clark and Aileen Keays (ISCJ).

Meeting commenced at approximately 12:45 pm

Hand-outs:

1. Agenda
2. The Sentencing Project's *Reducing Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System: A Manual for Practitioners and Policymakers*
3. Conference Evaluation Summary
4. Recommended Action Steps (from Breakout Sessions).

I. Welcome – Judge Harper

Member introductions

There were many recommended action steps for the Commission that came out of the break-out sessions. Judge Harper feels it may be best to bifurcate the action steps into two categories and prioritize them:

1. Things that we'd like to do that we can do
2. Things that are important but we may not be able to do

II. *Disparity in Connecticut* conference wrap-up – Deborah Fuller

a. Evaluations

Brief review of the Conference Evaluation Summary findings.

- Questions were rated on a four-point scale: 1 "very satisfied" to 4 "very dissatisfied".
- Overall, the responses were positive: all questions received a score between 1 and 2 ("very satisfied" to "satisfied").

- The question that received the poorest score, a score of 2 “satisfied”, was question #7 “the conference was well organized”.
 - The interpretation of this response was that registration could’ve been better. Hosting the event at CCSU, although very nice and accommodating, had some rooms that were relatively spread-out. The staff did their best to simplify going from one room to another but it may have contributed to the sense of disorganization.
- Members at the meeting replied that attendance was close to 700: it’s difficult to organize 700 people anywhere.

b. Recommended Action Steps

Deborah Fuller provided background on how the Commission collected the Recommended Action Steps.

- The Commission plans on posting the recommendations on its website once they are approved by members.
- The break-out session on the media was identified by members who were in attendance at the conference as being the most contentious break-out session.

Discussion:

- One commission member commented that the representatives from education that attended the conference felt that it was important for them to be there, but didn’t feel included.
 - Response: the conference was open to the public and Commission members tried to get the word out to everyone
- OCSA said that the people their office represents felt they should’ve been more included, as well. They should’ve been invited to be part of panels, etc.
 - It also, would’ve been helpful to have a resource list: Boys and Girls Clubs, other programs in the community that help youth
- Police officers did not receive notification of the event and those that did, didn’t receive it early enough. The conference was not advertised through POST, etc.
 - Response: if they would like to communicate with us than we’re willing to meet with any group
 - Also, this was our first event: we need to learn from this inaugural conference including who needs to be at the table so we can be sure to include them in the future.
 - The Commission is inviting feedback and criticism to learn from

Break-out Session Recommendations

1. The Media & its Role in Shaping Perceptions of Race & Ethnicity

Key Issues Identified (from the Recommended Action Steps hand-out):

1. Biased Reporting
 - a. Negative photographic images of minorities
 - b. Suburban coverage vs. urban coverage: crime is shocking vs. routine
 - c. Stories that foster an “us” vs. “them” mentality (suburbs vs. city)
2. Under-reporting of positive stories in minority communities/cities
 - a. What “sells” or is “sexy” vs. what’s important
3. Failure of the media to examine underlying causes of crimes
 - a. Underreporting of the root causes of crime
 - b. Lack of analysis and context of crime
 - c. Lack of media coverage of cities as a dumping ground
4. Failure by the media to be accountable and admit there’s a problem
5. Concentrated ownership of media outlets
 - a. Unwillingness to talk about the role of race

Discussion

- The most controversial topic was the disparate displaying of mug shots on television and in print media
 - WFSB shows the mug shots of arrestees when they get them. However, the State Police, who cover the highways and CT’s smallest towns, have a policy to not release mug shots. Therefore, news media are left with the mug shots from CT’s larger cities, which are disparately populated by people of racial & ethnic minorities.
 - WFSB – felt mug shots were what the public wanted.
 - Channel 3’s Dave Ward e-mailed Andrew Clark following the event and indicated that he would meet with his news crew and state police to bring the message to them.
- Mug shots are not the only problem: it’s also how stories are presented.
- Structural racism is at the heart of the problem; if deal with mug shots, it is just a symptom of structural racism. If we address mug shots it’s not getting at the heart of the problem.
- Deb disagrees and feels that we can and should address the smaller things.
- Change TVs focus from the shorter stories to longer, more in-depth stories.
- Reporters are spoon-fed; they are given a news clip which they just report out.

- The Commission could help news get access to the stories that we/public want them to pursue
- Impression that the people who attended the conference as panelists for media were mid-level
 - Could we get a higher level of management to talk with?

What can the Commission do?

- Commission could report on its findings
- Need to educate management
- Media has become regional: the front page of the New Haven paper will be different depending upon your region: inner city may have photo of shooting while shoreline will be something else.
- Not just local/regional newspapers, it's national

Recommendations from the Media break-out Session:

1. Establish an independent body to audit the news media to look at things like the number of positive story press releases sent out vs. number of stories actually covered
 - a. How going to do that? How going to know what stories haven't been covered?
 - b. Conduct an audit of local newspapers and maybe national of how races are portrayed so can demonstrate it to media personnel
 - i. Panelists didn't seem to see that there was a problem and felt that they had no control over the news in their positions.
 2. Promote a consistent policy for the dissemination of mug shots
 3. Media should work with community leaders to identify positive stories and get feedback on their coverage, with the Commission serving as facilitator
 - a. Start the dialogue to help minorities report positive stories to the mainstream media
 4. Encourage schools to view news analytically
 5. Educate reporters on race and racial issues
 - a. Train journalism students in portrayal of race in the media
 - b. SDE should incorporate critical thinking skills in their curriculum and look at how teachers are bring trained
 - c. Recommendation: to teach critical thinking skills
2. Urban vs. Suburban Policing

Key Issues Identified:

1. Race is an issue: people need to acknowledge the disparity that exists across the board

2. The need for uniformly available early intervention for young people
 3. The need for diversity in all aspects of the Criminal Justice System
3. Recommendations from the Urban vs. Suburban Policing Session:
1. Promote equality in policing policies (free from cultural and institutional bias)
 2. Require/promote diversity training/education for police officers
 3. Work with grassroots agencies to build programs
 4. Invest in prevention and community-based services

Discussion

- It is difficult to hire police; difficult to be selective
- For one department: High school diploma or GED would qualify you to become a police officer
- W. Hartford requires an Associates now
- Recruitment is severely lacking
- Beginning to accept officers with history of criminal activity as long as it was several years ago and they have demonstrated a change in their life.
- Recruit people when they're young and show them the requirements to be hired as an officer. Many are shocked at how difficult it is.
- Many officers feel that their hands are tied and they don't have many options other than arrest. Specifically, items 3 & 4 seem to stem from needing an alternative. JRBs discussed. Other areas need JRBs too. Resources needed to intervene with the family is greater in the city as opposed to suburban
- Recommendation #2: POST and state police both require diversity training, some departments mandate follow-up annually
- Demonstrates lack of knowledge in the training officers receive and requirements to become an officer
- How can we get the messages out? The low recruitment levels may be the incentive to "advertise" more flexible recruitment requirements.
- Unless received a pardon, their record is there.
- Recommendation #2 may be that the public perceives the diversity training as ineffective
- School resource officer
 - If you put an officer into a community, they're going to make arrests
 - The use of the SRO varies depends upon the district. In Hartford, hold a truancy caseload and the SRO is responsible for taking their attendance and making house calls if they're not in school

- Discussion ensued place on SROs and their use in schools
 - JJAC has a training created by police officers on how police should interact with youth
 - Some of the police officers that do the training have actually been asked to go out of state to conduct it. “Police Training Curriculum”, it’s posted on the JJAC website. Info on cultural differences, how to approach situations, etc
4. effect of war on drugs & mental health
- Crisis Intervention Teams – MH care workers ride along with police to situations that may involve MH issues, or get a call if realize once at the scene and the worker meets them at the scene
 - WA State Policy - study of programs – one of most cost-effective programs was this sort of program.
 - ISJC has hosted the CIT trainings with CABLE and NAMI. Interested in bringing training to more officers and working to do that. Would also like to bring it to EMT, etc
 - Maybe the Commission should coordinate with Siting Committee on identifying how we can house the mentally ill reentering the community from prisons.
 - Two most critical are #3 and 6. #3 is about discretion for judges and maybe allow judges to relieve the pressures on the system
 - #6 may be in a situation with the poor economy where could do that
 - Report from Sentencing Project on the War on Drugs and its influence on the prison pop that Pat Hynes sent-out before last meeting discusses and clearly outlines the cost-effectiveness
 - ISJC could replicate it demonstrating the cost it caused CT
 - Should we invite OPM and JJAC to assist with data collection
 - Response: needs to be out of OPM; too political. If it’s going to say something that is ugly, it won’t make it out of OPM.
 - If these suggestions are appropriate for us, they may be appropriate for JJAC or OPM
 - They are looking into MH and have the Commissioner of MH in CT on their panel
 - This is the ideal time to push for programming that demonstrates cost-effectiveness
 - Aside from numbers, qualitative information may color the problem. People’s stories of how mandatory minimums and War on Drugs have negatively influenced the country
 - Economic crisis has made for very good bedfellows, locking people up has caused big issues for ppl who may not have cared previously. It’s effecting their wallet as the state spends so much on DOC
 - Make what we want for other reasons, make financial sense
5. Juvenile Justice
- JJAC likely has all of these recommendations listed somewhere. Also good entrée into the school system
 - JJAC wants to be involved and connected

- Also does DMC study annually
- Has interest in juveniles and our issue
- Suggestion to have joint meeting to discuss these recommendations, etc hopefully soon so something can be done in Jan/Feb, during next session
- Should we do same thing with education? Meet with education regarding SRO and FWSN, etc
 - One difficulty with education is can work with SDE but still have all the different Board of Eds. Have CABA and other teacher unions.
 - Magnet schools have different way of dealing with students.

Use strategies in Sentencing Project booklet and adapt the recommendations to fit within our recommendation categories

III. Other business

Meeting adjourned at 2:25 pm

Deb's three follow-up tasks from Monday's meeting:

- 1. Set-up a meeting of the Steering Committee with education people -- CABA & CAS, making sure we get the urban superintendents.**
- 2. Set-up a meeting with the JJAC (Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee)**
- 3. Look into having a CT specific study that would replicate the methodology of the Sentencing Project study on the effect of the war on drugs on prison population**
- 4. Pursue legislation to repeal mandatory minimums. Get back-up information to support the repeal, from a cost perspective.**