Commission on Racial & Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System

MINUTES

03/17/08 Meeting

Persons present:
Judge Harper, Andrew Moseley, Deb Fuller, Donald Green, Fran Carino, Gary Roberge, Glenn Cassis, Jeanne Milstein, Judith Rossi, Kay Berris, Maureen Price-Boreland, Merva Jackson, Pat Hynes, Werner Oyanadel, Winston Johnson, Bill Rosenbeck, Hakima Bey-Coon, Aileen Keays, Andrew Clark, Lyndsay Ruffolo

Meeting commenced at approximately 12:45pm

I. Welcome – J. Harper

II. CCSU review of activities/project update

- Meetings with police chiefs
  
  o CCSU discussed their meetings with Chief Norwood of the Bridgeport Police Department and Chief Roberts of the Hartford Police Department.

Discussion:

  o For the Bridgeport Martial Arts Program, try the following for meeting locations:
    
    ▪ The new juvenile detention center in Bridgeport
    ▪ Schools (Parks & Rec.)
    ▪ YMCA
    ▪ Boys and Girls Club

  o CT Juvenile Justice Advisory Commission (JJAC) will be offering a grant of about $10,000 for chiefs initiating unique programs for youth.

  o Would the private industry assist with funding transportation?
    
    ▪ Liability issue; speak with insurance agencies, CBIA, etc.

  o Would a donation of bus passes be beneficial?

- Website

  o Aileen Keays has been granted System Administrator access by DOIT which is required to edit the state website.

  o The REDCJ website can be found on the state website under “State Agencies”.
• Conference

Discussion:

- Are there other groups like ours that may have been down this road before and could share their insight?
  - Will look into

- Concern focusing on youth is watering our agenda; many groups are working on youth, we have the chance to put this issue out there but by focusing on youth we may be losing our purpose.
  - The problem of disparity is huge: economical, political, etc., our commission can’t solve all of those issues at this time, but we can help by focusing on the front-end of the problem. Once youth are in the CJ system, they are then the adults in the CJ system.

- Glenn Singleton from Board of Education may be a great keynote.

- Maybe get young people to assist with planning the conference.

- ISCJ could put together a video of youth discussing the issue
  - Can be shown at the beginning of the conference to put a face to the problem.

- Suggestion of creating an advisory committee to focus on the conference
  - Include kids on the planning committee.
  - Could add the conference as a component of the Steering Committee so don’t have too many committees.

• Training Initiative

- Southern Poverty Law Center has curriculum information online – videos, DVDs

III. Update on Sentencing Task Force

• H.B. 5924, An Act Establishing a Sentencing Commission
  - Public Hearing will be held on 03/20/08
  - If Commission wants to support the bill, we could submit written testimony.
Andrew Clark gave background on the purpose and function of a Sentencing Commission.

Look at the previous Sentencing Commission

- What were their issues?
- Did they have funding problems that would only be re-created if we passed this bill?

Concern raised by some Commission members over the suggested make-up of the permanent Sentencing Commission on the proposed bill

- If the Commission formally supports the bill, would like a comment about the proposed members of the Commission.
  - Need people that understand the issue, look into the financial impact, include racial issues.

 Shall include a racial disparity impact component.

Vote taken to formally support the bill

- Concern raised that some members’ employer may be submitting their own testimony; therefore must refrain from voting.

All others voted to support the bill

IV. Synopsis of Pew Charitable Trusts’ “One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008”

Andrew Clark gave a synopsis

- Nationally, 1 in 9 black men between the ages 20-34 is behind bars. Significantly different than white males over 18 years old: 1 in 106; Hispanic men over 18 years old: 1 in 36.

- Burgeoning population among women: black women now 1 in 100 (between 35-39 years old). America incarcerating at a rate much higher than rest of the world; 750 per 100,000 adult Americans, Denmark 67 out of 100,000.

- Report includes suggestions for reducing crime and prison population:
  - Changing how deal with technical violations and promoting alternatives to incarceration.

- Length of stay has really driven up the population in CT

- CT has highest rate of incarceration in New England
Report includes very illustrative maps and charts

CT is one of 5 states spending more on corrections than higher education

CT, as compared to other states in the U.S., ranks in the middle, however we’re the highest in New England.

Increased cost of health care in the prison system is another issue due to geriatric health problems (aging prison population), HIV, etc.

Estimated that in Hartford, 1 in 4 males somehow connected to CJ system; on probation, parole, etc.

*Discussion:*

Maybe we can work with Pew to isolate CT numbers and present them at our conference?


- Judith Rossi gave a synopsis of the report authored prior to "Capital Punishment in Connecticut, 1973-2007: A Comprehensive Evaluation from 4600 Murders to One Execution" and posed concerns over the validity of the study the second report is based upon.

  - Public Defenders had been looking for someone to conduct a study on the death penalty and race.
  
  - Public defenders commissioned and paid for a study, report didn’t say what they wanted it to so they didn’t publish it.

    - That unpublished report is the first one that Judith reviewed with the group.

  - They then found Prof. Donohue who was a previous public defender and outspoken against death penalty.

- Preston’s response

  - Original issues were intended to be part of litigation, the litigation never took place, determined not enough data to make a statistically reliable finding.

  - The second report was requested by special public defenders – private attorneys handling conflict matters.
• A judge had said all cases should be brought together and handled in habeas manner; needed a study for the case so special public defenders paid for it and commissioned it.
  o Conducted for persons on death row to bring a suit of habeas corpus

  o In our system, historically speaking, crimes most punished involved a black perpetrator and white victim.
  o Least punished crime has always been white on black crime.
  o Not enough statistical data in CT on white on black crime, but do for black on black.
  o Death penalty is pursued less frequently if black on black.
  o Disparity in this manner has become so common it is not noticed, it is in our culture.
  o Urban League has done fantastic studies – reviewed all NY papers, black perpetrators (?) make up 65% of crimes in NY, but black perpetrators make up 85% of all printed perpetrator photos in newspapers.
  o Last paragraph of the report is very telling.
  o The Commission’s mandate does not say we’re to look for whether there is disparate treatment based on race, it says there is disparate treatment and we are to look at it.
  o Certain factors are intended to determine whether a crime is a capital offense

• Commission shall read both reports to see if either have any implication for this Commission.

VI. Other business

Meeting adjourned at approximately 1:50pm