

MULTNOMAH COUNTY JUDGES' RESPONSE TO LISTENING SESSIONS AND SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

On August 30, 2016, November 3, 2016, and February 15, 2017, the judges of the Multnomah County Circuit Court held a series of community listening sessions to hear directly from members of this community about their experiences with the criminal justice system.

Below is a summary of the statements we heard from community members who participated in the three listening sessions:

- **Measure 11.** Mandatory sentences under Measure 11 are not always fair and just, and are unduly disruptive to families and the community.
- **Drug offenses.** Most people convicted of drug offenses need treatment, not incarceration. The system needs to recognize this and respond appropriately.
- **Poverty.** Many people connect with the criminal justice system because they are poor and do not have any options for escaping poverty. More services are needed.
- **Education.** Our system of education is not always responsive to the needs of children and their families. People need better education and opportunities to succeed.
- **Probation.** People need a realistic opportunity to successfully complete their probations. The terms of probation often seem structured to set people up for failure.
- **Financial conditions.** It is difficult and disruptive for some people and their families to try to find money to pay all the fines, fees, and other charges imposed by the system.
- **Juveniles.** The juvenile justice system often breaks families apart instead of working with families to improve and avoid further violations of the law.
- **Families.** Children are unfairly taken away from their families by DHS and/or family courts. Families need more help working with problem children.
- **Police.** Police officers seem to target African-American and Latino citizens for arrest without sufficient cause. People in our community should not be targeted based on the color of their skin.
- **District Attorneys.** The DA's office seems to charge too many Measure 11 crimes and pushes too hard for long terms of imprisonment. Plea bargains are often unfair.
- **Defense Attorneys.** The public defenders are overworked. They have too many cases and often seem to push for a plea to relieve their workload without fully considering the needs of the accused and his or her family.
- **Department of Human Services.** DHS does not offer the services families need to address the challenges relating to drugs, gangs, weapons, mental health, and other issues.
- **Probation officers.** Probation officers are not flexible in dealing with probationers and their families. They seem to be setting people up for failure.
- **Judges.** Judges need to recognize that people of color are arrested, convicted and incarcerated at rates that are higher than white people. Judges need to treat people accused of crimes as people, not as statistics. Judges need more training.

The court has heard your concerns. While some things are beyond our control, we believe that having this dialogue is a good start. We pledge to do our best to work with other stakeholders

in the criminal justice system—police, district attorneys, defense lawyers, probation officers, DHS—and other community leaders to improve our system. We pledge to continue this dialogue and share what we are doing in response to your concerns.

Although, this list is not exhaustive, the court suggests the following next steps to improve our system as well as the public’s understanding of the legal system:

- Enhance civics education and law-related education.
- Support improving the education system to reduce crimes by youth and give them a path to success.
- Educate members of the community about the legal system to promote more positive views of the system. Create programs to educate the community about court operations (for example using curricula, videos, outreach efforts by judges and community courtrooms).
- Focus on humanizing and demystifying court processes in the high-volume courts.
- Recognize that perceptions run all ways: judges, court personnel, attorneys, and litigants all make assumptions about the people they see.
- Support mandatory, continuous implicit bias and diversity training for law enforcement, judges and court personnel.
- Promote training for judges and court personnel that leads to consistent answers on procedure for litigants.
- Increase the number of diverse people serving as attorneys and judges. Examine barriers to law school admissions for diverse applicants. Expand criteria for judicial competence.
- Increase the diversity of people who work in the courts.
- Promote more discussions and interaction between judges and members of the community.
- Support programs and legislation that will support greater resources to the legal system.
- Identify and address causes for sentencing disparities and encourage substantive law and policy changes in response.

We thank you—the people of this community—for attending the listening sessions and having the courage to share your stories. Let us begin productive conversations on specific actions that the court and the public will take to make a difference in our community.