

Minority & Justice Implementation Committee

Press Release:

Minority and Justice Implementation Committee Has Early Success- Kudos to Co-chair Dan Harris.

In January of 2003, the Minority and Justice Task Force released its Final Report, concluding a two-year study of the Nebraska court system and legal profession. The major recommendation of the Final Report was to establish a standing committee to implement the Task Force's recommendations. The Minority and Implementation Committee, consisting of a racially and ethnically diverse group of judges, lawyers and community leaders, has been formed and has critically reviewed the recommendations made in the Final Report.

The Implementation Committee has already made significant progress. First, the Task Force Final Report has been disseminated to judges and court personnel throughout Nebraska. Second, the University of Nebraska College of Law has been awarded a grant designed to increase minority interest in and preparedness for law school. Third, in May of 2003 an amendment was made to LB 19 requiring the courts to refresh their jury pool source lists. The Committee has received anecdotal evidence that this legislative change has already made a significant impact on diversifying Nebraska's juries.

The Implementation Committee is currently working on a number of initiatives. Efforts include: ensuring that juries are more representative of their communities; ensuring that diversion options are not inaccessible on the basis of language skills or income; ensuring effective interpreter services to the increasing number of non-English speaking court users; and providing multicultural competency training to Nebraska's judges, court personnel and legal profession.

There is no doubt that the success of the Minority and Justice Task Force and Implementation Committee are in part due to the outstanding leadership of co-chair, Dan Harris, Jr. Harris has played an integral part in both the Task Force and Implementation Committee, stressing such issues as racial profiling, prosecutorial discretion, and the importance of involving the community in the Committee's efforts to promote change. Harris has enjoyed a successful career in Nebraska, serving as the Vice President and Associate General Counsel Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company. Additionally, Harris

is a past chairman of the Board of Directors for the Nebraska Urban League and a past member of the Legal Aid Society Board of Directors and Development Counsel. He is a Nebraska State Bar Foundation Fellow, past president of the Midlands Bar Association, and member of the National Bar Association. The Implementation Committee regrettably announces that Harris will be stepping down from his role as co-chair of the Implementation Committee, but will continue serving on the Implementation Committee as an ex-officio member.

Linda Crump, the Assistant to the Chancellor for Equity, Access, and Diversity Programs of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will be Harris's replacement. As a member of the original Minority and Justice Task Force, Crump brings extensive experience to the Implementation Committee. She has served on the Nebraska State Bar Association House of Delegate for three terms and as chair in 2000. She is currently serving as the chair of the Nebraska State Bar Association Standing Committee on Professionalism.

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