



Children's Commission.

For Judges Handling Child Protective Services Cases

March 10, 2017

Beyond the Bench: Law, Justice, and Communities Summit

Texas' two highest courts, the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, spearheaded the Beyond the Bench: Law, Justice, and Communities Summit on December 14, 2016 at Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas, for a day of discourse with the judiciary. The Summit brought together more than 200 Texas judges, law-enforcement officers, public servants, along with national, state, and community leaders with the objective of strengthening trust and confidence in our justice system.

Public trust is the justice system's principal asset, but a recent study by the National Center for State Courts found that only 32 percent of black Americans believe state courts provide equal justice for all. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s reminder that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," Supreme Court of Texas Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht has designated the conversation about justice, race, and bias in Texas to be a judicial priority. "As judges, we're concerned that communities without trust in police will not trust their courts—and not just the criminal courts," Hecht said. "We can either accept distrust as inevitable or we can work to change it. We choose to work to change it." The summit, he said, was "intended to bring together many different perspectives to listen to and learn from each other."

Summit speakers and topics included:

- Supreme Court of Texas Justice Eva Guzman, who acknowledged that "disparate views about the rising tensions between law enforcement and communities of color are shaped by the unique experiences of a diverse citizenry;"
- Hon. Eric T. Washington, chief judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, who moderated a panel of speakers who shared moving stories about interactions between community members and law enforcement;
- Cornell Law School Professor Jeffrey Rachlinski, who shared his research on cognitive and social psychology, laying a foundation for the brain science behind decision-making and the mental shortcuts that can lead to bias; and
- F. Scott McCown, former judge and current director of the Children's Rights Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law, who moderated an interactive, multidisciplinary panel which examined a fictional scenario and discussed various decision-making points in time that could dramatically affect the trajectory of that child's life.

The event closed with small groups of participants who discussed and proposed "Big Ideas" in response to a question designed to spur action: What is a practical first step you can take now to bring about change in your community, profession, organization, or agency? Overall, participants submitted ideas for promoting accountability, awareness, community efforts, court improvement, data collection and analysis, education, legislation, organizational and personal goals, and better training.

To learn more, please read the Texas Bar Journal's March issue featuring an [article](#) about the Summit. Additionally, a Summit Toolkit is available on the Texas Judicial Branch's [website](#), to offer assistance in planning similar convenings and to inspire continued conversation about this important issue. The

Toolkit includes video of the entire event, feedback, and results from the Big Ideas collected during the breakout session.



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