

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL COMMITTEE
Oregon Judicial Department



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**Oregon Judicial Department Status Report 2005-2006
National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts**

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL COMMITTEE

Former Chief Justice Wallace P. Carson, Jr. established the Oregon Judicial Department Access to Justice for All Committee (Access Committee) in 1997. This committee continues the Oregon Supreme Court's efforts to ensure that all persons in Oregon have equal access to state courts for fair and efficient dispute resolution.

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) has produced four reports that describe barriers to access, recommend changes, and highlight progress to date. All reports are available online at <http://www.ojd.state.or.us/access>.

- 1994 Report of the Oregon Supreme Court Task Force on Racial/Ethnic Issues in the Judicial System
- 1996 A Commitment to Fairness: Progress Report of the Oregon Supreme Court Implementation Committee
- 1998 Report of the Oregon Supreme Court/Oregon State Bar Task Force on Gender Fairness
- 2002 Gender Fairness 2002: Implementation Status Report of the Oregon Judicial Department Access to Justice for All Committee

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In the last year, the Oregon Judicial Department has continued efforts to ensure access to the courts by taking steps to diversify its workforce and volunteers, evaluating the accessibility of state courts to individuals with limited incomes and people with disabilities, and providing ongoing education to judges and staff on fairness issues.

Task Force on Access to State Courts for Persons with Disabilities.

The Oregon Supreme Court and the Oregon State Bar established a joint task force to assess the accessibility of Oregon courts for people with disabilities.

The three principal objectives for the task force are:

1. to evaluate the accessibility of Oregon state courts
2. to educate state judges and court staff about accessibility, and
3. to offer recommendations for improving accessibility

Following the lead of the Gender Fairness Task Force some years earlier, the task force agreed to consider whether disability coupled with certain other personal characteristics compound difficulties in access to state courts and their services. The Task Force expects to publish its final report summer 2006.

Citizen Review Board Diversity. The OJD Citizen Review Board (CRB) is Oregon's statewide foster-care review program of citizen volunteers, created to help state courts ensure that case plans and services meet the needs of children and youth in foster care. Over the last year, the CRB has actively utilized its county specific diversity recruitment plans in soliciting new members to the volunteer boards in all 33 counties it serves. As of January 1, 2005, the CRB recruited nine applicants eligible for a stipend (met poverty guidelines), three recruits who identify as Hispanic, and three recruits who are members of a federally recognized tribe. These results equate to an approximate four percent increase in diversification of volunteers.

Performance Measures. The Oregon Judicial Department 2005-07 Strategic Plan includes the following three performance measures to improve access to the courts:

- 1) Accessible interpreter services: percent of spoken language interpreter services expenditures by certified interpreters.
- 2) Representative Workforce: percent of demographics of OJD employees and Oregon's civilian labor force by EEO job categories.
- 3) Quality of self-represented services: percent of circuit courts with adequate facilitator staff capacity per number of self-represented domestic relations filings.

Each Oregon Circuit Court and the Office of the State Court Administrator have developed strategies related to each measure.

Judge and Staff Education.

- The Oregon Judicial Department presented the Fourth Family Law Conference in April 2006. The theme for the conference was "Out of the Frying Pan—Burning Issues in Access to Justice," and focused on issues presented by the increase in self-represented litigants in Oregon's courts and the practical aspects of how best to serve this population in and out of the courtroom. The keynote speaker was national writer and speaker on issues of access to justice and the judicial response to self-represented litigants, Richard Zorza.
- Oregon's Court Interpreter Services staff developed and delivered a multifaceted training program on the use of indigenous languages in the court. Training is provided for indigenous language interpreters, Spanish interpreters who work with them as relay interpreters, attorneys, and judges. Additionally, OJD has increased training opportunities for interpreters of non-certified languages.
- The OJD developed a training program for court staff titled "Creating a Culturally Responsive Court." The program was very well received by court staff and will be piloted with judges in August 2006.
- Three Oregon judges received national training to present a curriculum for judicial officers on managing cases when defendants have co-occurring disorders. They presented the training to 35 judges in March 2006.

Outside the Courts:

Executive Order on Equality in Oregon. Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski established the *Governor's Taskforce on Equality in Oregon*. The task force will review, analyze, and recommend changes to the laws and administrative rules of the State of Oregon in order to ensure that all levels of state government afford the same rights and privileges to all Oregonians regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and to ensure that Oregon law provides an appropriate legal pathway for grievance, enforcement, and resolution if Oregonians experience unequal treatment or discrimination in either the public or private sectors.

For more information, contact:

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