



ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL COMMITTEE

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Oregon Judicial Department Status Report 2006-2007 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 five 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
- 2006 Report of the Task Force on Access to State Courts for Persons with Disabilities

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In the last year, the OJD 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/Oregon State Bar Task Force released their final report in August 2006. The final report offers multiple recommendations to the Oregon Judicial Department, the Oregon State Bar, and building owners that house state court facilities to improve access to Oregon state courts for persons with disabilities. Legislation is pending for the development of a State Court Facilities Commission and funding stream to support facility improvements. Currently, state courts are working with county officials to identify a plan of action to address readily achievable barrier removal to bring court facilities into compliance with ADA standards, where needed.

Judge and Staff Education.

It is the policy of the Judicial Education Committee and Education and Training component of the Court Programs and Services Division to incorporate fairness issues and ethics issues in every education program and product that the Oregon Judicial Department sponsors or co-sponsors, including those on substantive law and court processes and administration. At the 2006 Judicial Conference, a new program addressing disproportionate sentencing issues was favorably received.

Court Interpreter Services.

Oregon Judicial Department's Court Interpreter Services (CIS) 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. Currently CIS provides interpreter services for as many as 100 languages.

Citizen Review Board Diversity. The OJD Citizen Review Board (CRB) is Oregon's statewide foster-care review program, created to help state courts ensure that case plans and services meet the needs of children and youth in foster care. The 91 boards are manned by trained volunteers and an OJD Field Manager. The CRB actively utilizes its county specific diversity recruitment plans in soliciting new volunteers to serve on boards in all 33 counties it serves in efforts to make the board volunteers more representative of the county populations.

Performance Measures. The Oregon Judicial Department 2007-09 Strategic Plan includes the following three statewide 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.

OJD Affirmative Action Report, January 2007.

The Affirmative Action Plan is the Oregon Judicial Department's statement of its voluntary commitment to ensuring equal employment opportunity and to valuing diversity in Oregon courts and offices. The OJD goal is to employ a highly qualified workforce that provides great service to this state and that represents the diverse population of Oregon. The OJD has initiated a pilot program in five counties that will gather and track applicant EEO data. Reports generated from this data will be used as a tool in efforts to better understand the diversity of applicant pools and to provide resources and training to hiring authorities to increase the diversity of applicant pools, if necessary. The pilot program will be reviewed at the end of June 2007, and any necessary adjustments will be made to the program prior to statewide implementation.

OJD Web Portal Project. The OJD has committed itself to building what will become the largest and most accessible "courthouse" in Oregon: a statewide electronic courthouse. That courthouse will provide a common experience for all people of the state, no matter where they are located. It will be the one place a person may visit and do business with any court in the state, at any time of the day, from anywhere in the world.

For more information, contact: *Maria Hinton, Access and Family Law Analyst*