

News

Dallas Bar Association

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Survey Results Announced Regarding Racial/Ethnic Bias in the Courts

Judges, Attorneys and Court Personnel Polled on Perceived Bias

A task force created in 2004 by the Dallas Bar Association to study perceptions of racial and/or ethnic bias in Dallas courts has released its results and recommendations (<http://www.dallasbar.org/taskforce/>). The stated mission of the “Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Bias in the Courts” is to achieve equal justice for all. Dallas-area judges and attorneys (including members of the District Attorney’s Office, the Public Defenders Office, and defense attorneys), as well as clerical personnel, were polled as a part of this survey.

In April 2005, surveys were sent to more than 1,500 Dallas-area attorneys, with approximately 22% responding. A second survey was then directed to 575 court professionals (including judges, bailiffs, court clerks, coordinators, and court reporters) during the summer of 2005, with a 36% response rate. In both polls, respondents were allowed to answer anonymously, and many questions were open-ended enabling the task force to develop recommendations to any perceived bias.

The surveys were designed, implemented and analyzed by the task force with the assistance of Dr. Cynthia Spanhel, a professional statistician who is the former director of Research and Analysis for the State Bar of Texas. From the results, the task force is recommending:

- An increase in the availability of interpreters and other multi-lingual personnel (or other resources) to interact between the public and the courts -- at stages other than just at trial.
- The development of a method to centrally collect records concerning the appointment of masters, guardians ad litem, mediators, and defense counsel -- and make these records available to the public.
- The development of joint working groups to analyze and improve minority participation on juries, as well as to ensure the fair and impartial treatment of criminal defendants.
- The development of diversity programs, directed at the legal community and the public.

The mission of the task force continues, as it assists in the implementation of recommendations and facilitates further dialogue on perceptions of bias in the court systems and relevant solutions.

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The Dallas Bar Association is a professional, voluntary organization of approximately 10,000 Dallas-area attorneys.