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Delaware Recognized for Racial Justice Improvement Project Efforts

The Delaware Courts, criminal justice agencies, and others were recognized for their leadership in efforts to implement racial and justice fairness initiatives during a conference sponsored by the American Bar Association on October 21 – 22, 2011 in Washington, D.C. In September 2010, Delaware was selected as one of four states to receive a \$24,000 two-year Racial Justice Improvement Project (RJIP) grant sponsored by the American Bar Association, as a part of the ABA's program to support state criminal justice systems in efforts to enact key practices to promote fair, efficient and accountable systems. Representatives of the jurisdictions receiving the ABA grants attended the Conference held to review progress midway in the grant period.

Cynthia Jones, RJIP Project Director, said: "We congratulate the Delaware RJIP initiative for the outstanding progress it is making in efforts to enhance racial and justice fairness."

The Delaware RJIP initiative is led by Supreme Court Justice Henry duPont Ridgely, with task force members including the Chief Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Delaware Department of Justice representatives, the Public Defender, Delaware State Police Superintendent, Probation and Parole Director of the Department of Corrections, community representation (Delaware Center for Justice), and the Delaware Criminal Justice Information System Director. Delaware's Criminal Justice Council and Administrative Office of the Courts provide support to the task force.

Delaware's RJIP task force's approach is two-pronged. First, steps are being taken to ensure that racial disparity does not play a role in cases in which a criminal defendant is charged with a violation of probation (VOP). Efforts completed include adopting bias-free decision making policy and training requirements for probation officers. Additional training and changes to DOC's automated data collection system to allow for automated tracking of graduated VOP sanctions are planned for the second year of the grant. Curt Shockley, Director of Probation and Parole, stated: "The RJIP initiative is providing an opportunity for the Division of Probation and Parole to review its internal processes to ensure that racial disparity does not play a role, no matter how small, in its officers' decisions. We are grateful to have the support of the courts, the ABA and the criminal justice community in these efforts."

Second, the task force is working with the Criminal Justice Council on implementation of CJC's Declaration of Leading Practices to Protect Civil Rights and Promote Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Criminal Justice System. The Declaration, adopted in April 2010, outlines steps to be taken by courts and criminal justice agencies, in a variety of areas, to ensure civil rights and racial and ethnic fairness. The Declaration can be viewed at <http://cjc.delaware.gov>.

Other actions taken as a direct result of task force initiatives include efforts by the Delaware State Police, which already has a strong initiative promoting bias-free decision making, to automate additional aspects of the traffic complaint/warning process. Colonel Robert Coupe, Delaware State Police Superintendent, expressed his appreciation of the RJIP process, and stated “I believe that the law enforcement community generally, and the State Police specifically, is benefiting from the work of the RJIP task force’s concentration on racial and justice fairness initiatives. When the automation of traffic warnings is completed, we will have the structure in place, as we do with automated traffic tickets, to readily review decisions to ensure they are bias-free.”

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,

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