

COMMISSION ON RACIAL & ETHNIC DISPARITY

IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

REDUCING DISPARITY IN CONNECTICUT'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

December 17, 2012

Approximately one hundred invited guests gathered at Central Connecticut State University on December 17, 2012 to participate in a day-long discussion on "Reducing Disparity in Connecticut's Criminal Justice System".

The day began with a powerful [presentation](#) by retired Supreme Court Justice, and Chair of the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System, [Justice Lubbie Harper, Jr.](#) Justice Harper's address detailed the severity of Connecticut's disparity problem within its criminal justice system, how that disparity affects the state as a whole, and why it is imperative for the state to be courageous in taking steps to mitigate the matter. Justice Harper also highlighted some of the positive and advanced actions the state has already taken to tackle this critical issue. Following Justice Harper's illuminating speech, Executive Director of [The Sentencing Project](#), [Marc Mauer](#), provided a keynote address summarizing the "[National Perspective on Disparity](#)".

Mr. Mauer presented attendees with information on the rates of disparity around the country, as well as initiatives in other states intended to address disparate representation of racial and ethnic minorities in criminal and juvenile justice systems. Mr. Mauer emphasized the importance of addressing disparity and continually working toward better systems and processes, the need for policymakers and representatives of different branches of government to be unyielding in their self-evaluation of policies, practices, and potential biases that may result in disparate representation. Mr. Mauer highlighted some of the progressive actions Connecticut has already taken, as well as those currently underway, to mediate this issue. To resolve lingering racial and ethnic disparity in Connecticut's criminal and juvenile justice systems, Mr. Mauer outlined four action steps for conference attendees to pursue:

- 1) Strive to become aware of, and address, any potential unconscious biases of practitioners.
- 2) Work to project any potential for disparate representation in our criminal or juvenile justice systems when considering new policies. For example, habitual offender laws almost inevitably result in a disparate racial impact.
- 3) Review and reconsider current practices for evidence of biases. For example, Connecticut's reconsideration of its crack-cocaine laws.
- 4) Devise ways Connecticut can level the playing field for all of its residents.

Following Mr. Mauer's keynote, he moderated a panel of representatives from Connecticut's criminal justice-related state agencies asking: "What are we doing, and what more can we do, to reduce racial disparity in our juvenile and criminal justice systems?" Participants spoke openly and honestly about imbalance in the system and at times engaged in debate over the type of practices that may have contributed to the racial and ethnic disparate representation.

Representatives of Connecticut's commissions and committees concerned with the criminal justice system and racial disparity explored a similar question during a follow-up panel moderated by Bill Dyson: "What are we doing, what more can we do, and what *should* we do to reduce racial disparity in

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our criminal and juvenile justice systems?”. The groups represented on the panel included the recently-established [Connecticut Sentencing Commission](#), the [Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee](#), the also recently-created [Racial Profiling Prohibition Project](#), the [Connecticut Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission](#), and of course the commission that hosted the day’s events, the [Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System](#).

To pursue these ventures, it was advised by Mr. Mauer, and subsequently Justice Harper during his closing remarks, that as individuals, agencies and organizations we take ownership of our influence and work collectively to diminish Connecticut’s disparity problem. It was widely noted that for collaboration to occur, the difficult task of holding analytical conversations must continue.

Connecticut’s commissions and committees, represented on our last panel, provide a unique platform for those conversations to take place.

To support those efforts, it was strongly recommended that attendees read The Sentencing Project’s report "[Reducing Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System](#)". In the report, The Sentencing Project outlines specific suggestions for each segment of the criminal justice system to consider and pursue.

To maintain the momentum generated during this day, and avoid duplication of efforts and resources, the state’s commissions and committees charged with addressing issues that may impact disparity in Connecticut’s criminal and juvenile justice systems should strengthen their alliance. Chairs of these organizations should continue communicating with each other about initiative successes and challenges, and those expected in the coming years.