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**2014 Report to the  
National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts**

**New Jersey Supreme Court Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts  
Statewide Court User Survey**

In 2011, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner created the Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts to ensure that the judiciary, as an institution, embraces “Access and Fairness” as an integral part of our core values. The work of this committee will set the tone for the operation of the Judiciary for the next quarter century and beyond. The framework for this effort is the concept called “procedural fairness” embraced by many of our counterparts in other states. Procedural fairness is a multi-element concept designed to improve the perception the public has of the court system based on how they feel about their courthouse and courtroom experience. The four core elements of procedural fairness are:

- Respect – People react positively when treated with politeness and dignity.
- Voice – People want to tell their side of the story and should have the opportunity to participate in court proceedings.
- Neutrality – People feel they are treated equally when those in authority such as judges and court managers are neutral and treat all consistently and fairly.
- Trust – People want to feel that their court experiences were just, regardless of the outcome. The public demands accountability.

As we reported last year, the Committee developed a public survey to evaluate our multi-prong efforts to provide access and fairness to citizens who utilize our courts. The survey was adapted from the National Center for State Courts Access and Fairness Survey. Surveys were translated into nine languages: English,

Spanish, Haitian Creole, Korean, Polish, Hindi, Gujarati, Portuguese, and Arabic. In addition, a video of an American Sign Language interpreter was available at every location for deaf or hearing impaired respondents.

In October 2013, all of the State's courthouses participated in the survey of court users, including litigants, attorneys, jurors, court observers and persons who were in the court seeking information or filing papers. The goal was to obtain baseline data of the public's perception of our efforts. The survey measured court users' opinions on: the ease with which they were able to locate the court facility; whether they felt safe, whether court forms are clear and easy to understand and whether they were treated with courtesy and respect by judges and other court personnel. A total of 16,497 completed surveys were collected during the week-long period. The overwhelming number of surveys collected demonstrates that court users were eager to participate. Over 1,500 court employees volunteered to monitor the daily administration and collection of the completed surveys. It was also evident that throughout the week that court staff maintained a very high level of enthusiasm.

The New Jersey Court has a strong tradition of self-critical analysis. This committee will continue that course of action by identifying impediments to access and fairness and develop programs and services to remove barriers. Those innovations will serve to improve public trust and confidence in the courts, increase efficiency, and enhance court user satisfaction. The Judiciary believes that having court users weigh-in on their respective assessments of court services is important work and that the information will assist the court in better serving the people of New Jersey. The results of the survey are being reviewed by our court services staff. While the preliminary responses tend to reflect a favorable assessment of the court users' experience, the in-depth analysis will likely highlight areas that require attention and possible redress. The completed report will be posted at [www.njcourts.com](http://www.njcourts.com).

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For further information on these and other related initiatives and the work of the Supreme Court Committees on Minority Concerns, and Access and Fairness, please contact Yolande P. Marlow, Ph.D., Executive Director of Minority Concerns, at [yolande.marlow@judiciary.state.nj.us](mailto:yolande.marlow@judiciary.state.nj.us) or (609) 633-8108.