



COMMITTEE ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC FAIRNESS IN THE RHODE ISLAND COURTS

Second Quarterly Report: June 30, 2025

On October 20, 2020, Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell issued Executive Order No. 2020-15 establishing the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Rhode Island Courts. The Committee is charged with identifying and confronting areas where racism, inequality and discrimination may exist in our judicial system and being the driving force of change within the Rhode Island Judiciary. Executive Order No. 2020-15 further provides that “the committee shall seek to identify and remediate bias and prejudice, both conscious and unconscious, in the administration of justice in this State. It should also work to develop programs and protocols for education and training with respect to racial justice, unconscious bias, and fairness, and make recommendations regarding the impact of race on various court processes.”

The following mission statement has guided the Committee’s work since it was established in 2020:

To enhance public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the Rhode Island Judiciary, and to promote a fair and bias-free justice system by: 1) engaging in self-examination, education, and public outreach; and 2) identifying areas of systemic racism, unconscious bias, disparate impact, and socioeconomic and other inequities; and 3) taking affirmative steps to self-monitor and combat inequities, so as to ensure a system that is accessible to all and treats all persons equally.

In accordance with Executive Order [2020-15](#) and Administrative Order [2024-12](#), the following judicial officers were reappointed for a second term, alongside the appointment of new selected members. This order reflects the Judiciary’s commitment to ensuring the continued service of experienced judicial officers while welcoming fresh perspectives to the Committee.

Hon. Paul A. Suttell, Chief Justice (ex Officio), R.I. Supreme Court

Hon. Melissa A. Long, Associate Justice (Chair), R.I. Supreme Court,
(Term expiring October 20, 2025)

Hon. Alberto Aponte-Cardona, Magistrate, R.I. Family Court
(Term expiring October 19, 2027)

Hon. Keith A. Cardoza, Jr., Associate Judge, R.I. Workers’ Compensation Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2027)

*Hon. Melissa R. DuBose, District Judge, U.S. District Court, District of R.I. (Associate Judge, R.I. District Court, 2019-2024) (Term expiring October 20, 2025)

Hon. Alan Goulart, Magistrate, R.I. Traffic Tribunal
(Term expiring October 20, 2027)

Hon. Colleen M. Hastings, Associate Judge, R.I. District Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2027)

Hon. Luis M. Matos, Associate Justice, R.I. Superior Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2025)

*Hon. John J. McConnell, Jr., Chief Judge, U.S. District Court, District of R.I.
(Term expiring October 20, 2026)

*Hon. Mary S. McElroy, District Judge, U.S. District Court, District of R.I.
(Term expiring October 20, 2027)

Hon. Edward H. Newman, Magistrate, R.I. Family Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2026)

Hon. Susan Pepin-Fay, Associate Judge, R.I. Workers' Compensation Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2026)

Hon. Christopher Smith, Associate Justice, R.I. Superior Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2027)

Hon. Lia N. Stuhlsatz, Associate Justice, R.I. Family Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2025)

*Hon. Patricia A. Sullivan, Magistrate Judge, U.S. District Court, District of R.I.
(Term expiring October 20, 2025)

Hon. Pamela Woodcock Pfeiffer, Associate Judge, R.I. District Court
(Term expiring October 20, 2027)

** On November 16, 2023, the Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island issued a [General Order](#) Regarding Appointment to the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Rhode Island Courts and subsequently appointed three judicial officers to serve as full members of the Committee for staggered three-year renewable terms. On January 6, 2025, Chief Judge McConnell issued a subsequent [General Order](#) Appointing Judicial Officers to the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Rhode Island Courts to reflect the elevation of the Hon. Melissa R. DuBose to the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island.*

Further, the following additional members continue to engage in the work of the Committee in an informal capacity, and the Committee continues to invite the engagement and input of all judicial officers in its important work.

Hon. Edward C. Clifton (ret.)

Hon. Shilpa Naik, Associate Justice, R.I. Family Court
Hon. Amanda Leigh Valentino, Magistrate, R.I. Superior Court

Executive Order No. 2020-15 authorizes invitations to members outside of the Committee to participate in its work; accordingly, the Committee holds joint meetings with the Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) of the Rhode Island Bar Association. The two Committees collaborate on projects aimed at addressing areas of disparate impact and inequities in our legal system.

The following Rhode Island Judiciary staff work with the Committee:

Julie P. Hamil, State Court Administrator
Chrisanne Wyrzykowski, Esq., Deputy General Counsel
Alexandra (Lexi) Kriss, Asst. State Court Administrator, Community Outreach & Public Relations
Sara Gilkenson, Diversity Coordinator

Committee Activities

Turning Pages:

The third season closed on April 28, 2025, with judicial officers gathering to view and discuss the documentary, “*Becoming Katharine Graham*,” which explores the life and impact of the first female publisher of The Washington Post.

Justice Riders 2024

Justice Riders 2024 brought together judges and legal professionals on a powerful journey in October 2024 to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama. The self-funded trip explored the nations’ painful and persistent legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the ongoing struggle for civil rights, deepening participants’ understanding of how this history informs justice today. Since the journey, Committee members and participants have continued to reflect and share their experiences.

- On April 15, 2025, Justice Long and Judge Clifton held a virtual fireside chat as the closing plenary session of the Annual Conference of the National Consortium on Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts (NCREFC). During the session, *Justice Riders 2024: Reflections on a Journey from Montgomery to Selma and Back*, Judge Clifton discussed his personal experiences with the Great Migration, a theme discussed by Bryan Stevenson, Esq., during his October presentation to the Justice Riders, and by Isabel Wilkerson during her keynote address during the NCREFC conference.
- On May 20, 2025, Committee members who participated in the Justice Riders trip shared their reflections at a public event hosted by the League of Women Voters of Newport County at the Jane Pickens Theater. Justice Long provided remarks followed by a panel discussion featuring Judges Clifton, Naik, and Hastings; the judicial officers shared the origins and goals of the trip, personal reflections, and the importance of understanding history to advance justice. (Judge Clifton once again shared powerful remarks about his personal experiences with the Great Migration.) The event also highlighted the work of

CREF—its mission, achievements, and commitment to civic engagement and historical awareness as central to shaping a more just judiciary. Several Committee members attended to share information about the Committee’s work over the last five years, with Judge Matos and Magistrate Goulart speaking about the Costs & Fines project.

- On June 12, 2025 (Loving Day), the Rhode Island Bar Association Annual Meeting featured *A Hundred New England Yankee Jurists in Judge Frank M. Johnson’s Alabama Court*, a workshop focused on the Justice Riders trip. Chief Justice Suttell provided opening remarks and Justice Long moderated a panel discussion with Chief Judge McConnell, Family Court Associate Justice Sandra Lanni, and Committee members Judge Hastings and Magistrate Sullivan. Short videos about the Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr. [Institute](#) and the Equal Justice Initiative Legacy [Sites](#) are available for those interested in learning more about those Montgomery organizations.

RWU School of Law Annual Diversity Symposium Dinner

On April 1, 2025, members of the Committee joined RWUSL Office of Diversity and Outreach at its Annual Diversity Symposium Dinner. The premiere networking opportunity connected professionals and peers in the legal field including current law students, and middle-high school students.

National Consortium on Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts Annual Conference

The Rhode Island Judiciary, in collaboration with the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts (NCREFC), hosted its annual conference virtually on April 14-15, 2025. This year’s conference theme is “*Resilience Through History: Reflecting on 150 Years of Progress and Setbacks in Racial and Ethnic Fairness.*”

The opening keynote address on April 14, 2025, *By Hands Now Known: Jim Crow’s Legal Executioners*, featured Professor Margaret A. Burnham. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson was the keynote speaker on April 15, 2025. The conference also featured sessions on jury diversification, immigration law, employment dispute resolution, and more.

R.I. Secretary of State Civic Summit Dinner

The Secretary of State’s Civic Summit returned April 15, 2025, with its program that introduces R.I. high school students to government. The students spent the day touring the state courts, beginning visits to the District Court and the Workers’ Compensation Court. They also attended a presentation highlighting the Family Court and the Traffic Tribunal at the Garrahy Judicial Complex. The day concluded with a tour of the Superior and Supreme Courts at the Licht Judicial Complex, followed by a dinner shared with Committee members, who spoke to the students and their experiences.

Judge Melissa DuBose Investiture Ceremony

On April 22, 2025, federal and state judicial officers, Committee members, legal community, and friends and family, participated in the Investiture Ceremony celebrating Judge DuBose’s elevation to the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island.

Deaf History Month, Lunch & Learn

On April 30, 2025, the Access to Justice Office in collaboration with the Community Outreach and Public Relations Office hosted a special presentation from Rhode Island's deaf and hard of hearing community, and learned about the resources the Judiciary offers to support court users who need listening assistance or interpreter services.

Law Day

On May 2, 2025, Committee members were among the many judicial officers who joined members of the R.I. Bar Association to celebrate Law Day. This year's theme, "*The Constitution's Promise: Out of Many, One*," emphasized how the U.S. Constitution unites a diverse nation through shared value of justice, liberty, and equality. The event engaged middle and high school students from across R.I. in conversations about the Constitution's role in shaping a just society. Beginning with the powerful words "We the People," the Constitution was explored as both a historical document and a living framework that continues to guide civic life today. Students from schools in communities statewide—including Cranston, Providence, Newport, Westerly, Woonsocket, and many others—participated in the celebration, making it an inclusive, educational experience. Law Day served as a meaningful opportunity to inspire civic understanding, encourage dialogue, and highlight the ongoing relevance of constitutional principles in promoting unity and justice.

African American Museum of Rhode Island

On May 12, 2025, Justice Long and Judge DuBose were honored at the African American Museum of R.I.'s inaugural *Preservation Breakfast: Celebrating Black Women*. The event recognized the powerful and enduring contributions of Black women to R.I.'s history and culture, while also supporting the Museum's mission to preserve and share the rich African American heritage of the state.

Law & Society Association Annual Meeting

Justice Long participated in a judges' roundtable discussion at the annual Law & Society Association Meeting, held May 22-24, 2025. The session, *Adaptive Judges and Innovative Responses to the Evolving Role of the Judge*, featured appellate and magistrate judges from federal and state courts in Colorado, California, Rhode Island, Illinois, and Brazil. The panel addressed pressing questions: How is judicial independence being challenged? What are the implications of rising numbers of self-represented litigants? How do racial and economic disparities, technological change, and global crisis affect access to justice? Justice Long highlighted the outreach and community engagement work undertaken by the Committee over the last five years.

Juneteenth 2025

- The Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations shared a message with Judiciary staff on behalf of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in recognition of Juneteenth. The message reflected on the significance of June 19, 1865—the day Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to deliver long-overdue news of emancipation to 250,000 enslaved Black people. The message highlighted the delayed justice and enduring impact of this historic moment, emphasizing the importance of remembrance, truth, and continued commitment to equity in the courts and beyond.

- *Juneteenth Celebration:* On June 19, 2025, Justice Long served as the keynote speaker for the Westerly Anti-Racism Coalition's (ARC) Annual Juneteenth Festival, held at Wilcox Park. ARC is an independent community coalition that works to embrace multiculturalism through education, engagement, and empowerment. The event honored the history and legacy of Juneteenth through celebration and reflection, guided by this year's theme: "*And Still We Rise: A Celebration of Community, Resilience, and Hope.*" Justice Long connected her journey in the law and Westerly's history to the ongoing pursuit of equity, inclusion, and justice—core values reflected in the spirit of Juneteenth, ARC's work, and the Committee's mission. The festival featured student essay contest award presentations, live music, storytelling, and shared meals—bringing together community members of all ages in a vibrant celebration of resilience and unity.

RWU School of Law, Mandell-Boisclair Social Justice Summer Camp

Roger Williams University School of Law hosted session one of the second annual Social Justice camp, designed for middle school students who are interested in learning more about the importance of law in daily life. Held June 23-27, 2025, session one of the camp covered social justice movements and featured a conversation with Dr. Karen Korematsu, daughter of the late civil rights' champion Fred Korematsu. Committee members engaged with presenters and campers at various sessions throughout the week.

Blueprint for Racial Justice – Northeast Region Workgroup for Racial Justice Education

The three-person team from Connecticut continues to spearhead monthly meetings with representatives from Delaware, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont to share thoughts, resources and best practices related to racial justice education in the courts. Various members of the Northeast Region Workgroup will participate in the annual meeting of the National Association of State Judicial Educators, to be held in Philadelphia, PA, from September 7-10, 2025.

Public Inquiries

The Committee continues to monitor an e-mail address where members of the public are welcome to send their thoughts, suggestions, stories and any other input that they wish to be considered in connection with the Committee's mission: CREF@courts.ri.gov.

A Look Ahead

- Continuing collaboration with the Committee on DEI of the R.I. Bar Association in pursuit of projects aimed at addressing areas of disparate impact and inequities in our legal system, including the expansion of civics outreach and education to foster better understanding of civic rights and responsibilities and encourage greater civic participation.
- Continuing collaboration with the Northeast Region Workgroup for Racial Justice Education.
- Continuing collaboration with Community Outreach Public Relations on future outreach and lunch and learn initiatives, including a learning opportunity concerning the Indigent Cemetery Project at the Rhode Island Training School.

- Outreach in observance of Constitution Day 2025.
- Lunch and Learn event in recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Conclusion

The Committee wishes to thank the Chief Justice for identifying the need for this important work and his commitment to ensuring that the Committee will succeed in its mission. The Committee looks forward to reporting its progress in the next quarterly report, due on September 30, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

The Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Rhode Island Courts

June 30, 2025.