



COMMITTEE ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC FAIRNESS IN THE RHODE ISLAND COURTS

Second Quarterly Report: June 30, 2026

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, Associate Justice, 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. District Court
(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. 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; resigned effective August 20, 2025)

** 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., General Counsel

Alexandra (Lexi) Kriss, Assistant State Court Administrator, Community Outreach & Public Relations

Sara Gilkenson, Diversity Coordinator

Committee Outreach, Engagement & Activities

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.

Justice Riders

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; the trip has catalyzed other learning opportunities.

- Members of the Rhode Island chapter of the Federal Bar Association, joined by members from the Massachusetts and Connecticut chapters and various community members, traveled to Alabama from May 4-9 for another Justice Riders trip. Upon their return, some of the attorney travelers joined Judges McConnell, McElroy, DuBose, Long, Clifton, and Lanni for a multigenerational community gathering. Attendees met with 8th graders from The Gordon School and high schoolers from Bishop Hendricken to share their reflections and lessons learned during the various journeys.



- Penn State Dickinson Law Antiracist Development Institute invited Judges DuBose and Long to participate in a panel discussion about the Committee, how Justice Riders dovetails with the Committee’s mission, and learning outcomes during their annual mini-convening, held in Montgomery from June 28-30.
- Planning is underway for a trip in January 2027 (Jan. 3-8) that will include 50 law students from Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Judicial officers interested in joining the trip, or future trips, are invited to complete a [short survey](#). For more detailed information, please visit the recently-launched [Justice Riders](#) website. (Be sure to check out “If These Walls Could Talk,” a panel discussion about the Hon. Frank Johnson and the Hon. Myron Thompson, available via YouTube link here: [From New England to the New South: Reflections on America’s Courtroom | United States District Court.](#))

African American Museum of Rhode Island

On April 4, 2026, Committee members attended the grand opening of the new museum space located on Broad Street in Providence. The new African American Museum of R.I. will serve as a permanent home for exhibitions, archives, youth workforce development, and public programs that uplift and educate the stories of Black Rhode Islanders.

Turning Pages

The fifth season concluded on April 10, 2026, with a group screening of *Join or Die*, a documentary film directed by Pete Davis and Rebecca Davis centered on America’s civic unraveling and based on the work of Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*.

Heart Mountain WWII Japanese American Confinement Site

On April 15, 2026, Committee members were invited to join the R.I. Women’s Bar Association and the R.I. Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers for a compelling CLE session presented by Aura Sunada Newlin of the Heart Mountain Foundation. The thought-provoking program explored the role of lawyers in the incarceration of Japanese-American citizens during WWII and the lasting ethical and professional lessons for today’s legal community.

Secretary of State, Civic Leadership Summit, Judiciary Day

The Secretary of State’s Civic Leadership Summit returned on April 21, 2026, with its program that introduces Rhode Island high school students to government. During the first half of “Judiciary Day,” students toured the Noel Judiciary Complex (Kent County) and were welcomed by panel participants from Family, District, Workers’ Compensation courts and the Traffic Tribunal. They also observed the District and Superior Court courtrooms at the Noel Judiciary Judicial Complex. The second half of the day featured a Supreme and Superior Court Staff Career Panel at the Licht Judicial Complex and concluded with a dinner shared with Committee members and other judicial officers.

Roger Williams University School of Law, AAPI/MENA Women in the Legal Academy Workshop

On April 24, 2026, RWUSL hosted the 5th Annual Workshop for Asian American Pacific Islander Middle Eastern and North African Women in the Legal Academy. Rhode Island jurists, Judges Long, Rekas Sloan and Naik, participated in a Conversation Between the Bench and the Academy, discussing how history informs our present and other topics.

National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts Annual Conference: “Equity, Justice, and the Rule of Law: The Enduring Role of the Courts”

On April 29 through May 1, 2026, Committee members attended the three-day virtual NCREFC conference that brought together court leaders, practitioners, and community stakeholders to discuss equity, justice, and strategies for ensuring accessible, fair, and impartial courts for all.

Law Day

On May 1, 2026, 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, “*Rule of Law and the American Dream*,” emphasized that individuals can challenge laws through the court system. The event engaged middle and high school students from across Rhode Island in conversations about whether one person can really change the law. Students from schools in communities statewide—including Block Island, Central Falls, Cranston, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, Woonsocket, and many others—participated in the celebration, making it an inclusive, educational experience.





2026 R.I. Kids Count Factbook Breakfast

On May 4, 2026, Committee members were among the many attendees who joined the annual breakfast. Representatives of R.I. Kids Count address data collected affecting Rhode Island children and families and the disparities in youth involvement in the justice system.

Massachusetts Changing Lives Through Literature Graduation Ceremony

On May 8, 2026, Committee members were invited to observe a graduation ceremony of Massachusetts probationers who successfully completed the Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) program. In the program, men and women on probation meet with a judge, a probation officer, and a facilitator in a seminar setting to discuss reading assignments. CLTL is premised on a belief in the transformative power of literature and the value of sharing ideas in a group setting. The Committee is investigating whether there might be an opportunity to pilot a similar program in Rhode Island. The successful [program](#) has been in place in Massachusetts for over 30 years.

Recognizing Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Lunch and Learn

On May 21, 2026, the Committee, in collaboration with the Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations and the Diversity Office, hosted a lunch-and-learn virtual event in honor of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month. The hosts welcomed Jeannie Salomon, Founder and Executive Director of the AAPI History Museum in Providence. Ms. Salomon spoke about her heritage, upbringing, and her journey in creation of the museum and commitments to education, community, and social justice.

Generation Citizen and the R.I. Civic Learning Coalition, Rhode Island Civic Day,

On May 22, 2026, Judge Hastings and Magistrate Valentino participated in Rhode Island Civics Day, an annual event that brings together middle and high schools students from Central Falls, East Providence, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket to present community-based civics projects to local leaders. The science-fair-style event provides an opportunity to engage meaningfully with small groups of students who are tackling challenges in their local communities and proposing systemic solutions.

Rhode Island Bar Association Committee on DEI

The Committee continues to work collaboratively with the Bar Association's Committee on DEI. The Committees held a joint meeting on June 8, 2026.

Juneteenth 2026

Justice Long joined community members who gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and opening of the Edward W. Kane & Martha J. Wallace Center for Black History at the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, a landmark addition to Newport's cultural landscape. Housed in the oldest existing home in Newport, the newly-opened Center for Black History explores how Black history and culture have been an integral part of the Newport community since at least 1652, when baptism records document that an enslaved man named Jack was baptized in the Church of Christ/First Baptist Church in Newport.

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 and CLEAR Working Group.
- 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.
- Continuing collaboration with the Jewish Community Center as part of the Leadership Institute for Teens (LIFT) program.
- Continuing collaborations with the following on future civics education outreach: Rhode Island Foundation, Secretary of State's office, Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England, and Rhode Island Kids Count.

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, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

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

June 30, 2026.