



COMMITTEE ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC FAIRNESS IN THE RHODE ISLAND COURTS

Third Quarterly Report: September 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; 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 Activities

Black and Indigenous Summer Institute, Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown

In July, Justice Long spoke at the Black and Indigenous Summer [Institute](#) at the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University. This dynamic, five-day program, hosted on Brown's campus, is open to all Rhode Island high school students and provides opportunities to connect and engage with topics of historical and contemporary significance.

This year's curriculum focused on two significant anniversaries:

- The 350th anniversary of the War for the Dawnland (also known as King Philip's War)
- The 160th anniversary of the 13th Amendment

Recent Developments in R.I. Law for LGBTQ+ People, Lunch & Learn

On August 5, 2025, the Judiciary held its Pride Month Lunch & Learn event, postponed from June due to scheduling conflicts. The event was co-hosted by the Community Outreach and Public Relations Office, the Diversity Office, and the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts.

Superior Court Magistrate Amanda Valentino opened the program, which featured a keynote presentation by Attorney Patience "Polly" Crozier, Director of Family Advocacy at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD). Attorney Crozier discussed the evolution of LGBTQ+ law in Rhode Island, highlighting legislative progress in family law, adoption, and health

care aimed at advancing equality for LGBTQ+ Rhode Islanders. She also review the broader legal landscape affecting LGBTQ+ families across the region.

R.I. Foundation Annual Awards, R.I. Philharmonic Orchestra's "Join us for Summer Pops in the Park"

In August, the Rhode Island Foundation (RIF), in partnership with the Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, the Roger Williams Park Conservancy, and the Providence Parks Department, presented a free Summer Pops in the Park concert by the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, at the Roger Williams Park Temple of Music.

During the intermission, the RIF presented the Civic Leadership Award to Magistrate Patrick T. Burke of the R.I. Superior Court. The Civic Leadership Award honors a public servant or other civic leader who exemplifies the ability to create a stronger, more vibrant community where all voices are heard, and collaboration is key to solving important issues and seizing emerging opportunity. The Committee nominated Magistrate Burke to recognize his leadership within the R.I. legal community and beyond.

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; the trip has catalyzed other learning opportunities.

- On September 2, 2025, Justice Long visited the Providence campus of Roger Williams University School of Law as a guest speaker for students enrolled in Employment Discrimination Law 819-A. Justice Long shared insights on the intersection of law, education, and civil rights, particularly as they relate to lessons learned from the Justice Riders experience and the historic role of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The discussion emphasized the federal changes that emerged from that era, the enduring importance of these laws, and how legal frameworks can be used to address systemic inequities today. Students engaged with Justice Long through questions and dialogue, deepening their understanding of civil rights and social justice.
- Inspired by discussions of Justice Riders 2024, various groups have been consulting with participants of the Justice Riders to plan upcoming trips to Alabama. Student Justice Riders is a program for students enrolled at various law schools in Massachusetts and Rhode Island who will visit Alabama in January 2026. A student group at Bishop Hendricken High School is also in discussions about a trip in the early part of the new year. Members of the Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut chapters of the Federal Bar Association will travel to Alabama in May 2026. Federal and state judges in Iowa are planning a similar trip.
- The 160th Anniversary of the 13th Amendment: The Undeniable History. This year marks the 160th anniversary of the ratification of the landmark 13th Amendment – a defining

moment in U.S. Constitutional history that officially abolished slavery. On December 3-4, 2025, the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness will co-sponsor a special educational event for judges, attorneys, law clerks, legal scholars, law students, and members of the public that will present the historical backdrop that led to the ratification of the 13th Amendment, the amendment's shortcomings, and the courts' role in effectuating the unrealized promises of the amendment. This program addresses the role that courts played and their current responsibility in the ongoing struggle for racial justice in this country. Through dialogue, reflection, and education, we aim to recognize the resilience of those who fought for freedom, and to deepen an understanding of the amendment's legal significance, as the beginning of a long, unfinished struggle for true equality and justice.

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 participated in the annual meeting of the National Association of State Judicial Educators, held in Philadelphia, PA, from September 7-10, 2025.

Salve Regina University, Panel Discussion in Celebration of Constitution Day, The Constitution: How and Why It Matters?

On Constitution Day, September 17, 2025, Justice Long participated in a fireside chat with Roger Williams Law Professor Peter S. Margulies, introduced by Dr. Mary Anderson, and moderated by Executive Director of the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, Dr. James M. Ludes. This discussion explored how the Constitution protects us in our everyday lives and touched on the importance of the ratification of the 13th Amendment. The program, “*The Constitution: How and Why It Matters?*” was presented in partnership with the Salve Regina University Pell Honors Program and the Brodsky Chair for U.S. Constitutional Democracy and Culture.

Lunch & Learn Series Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month – A conversation with Former Providence Mayor Angel Tavares and Family Court Magistrate Alberto Aponte Cardona, Sr.

On September 24, 2025, the Committee, in collaboration with the Judiciary's Diversity Office, and the Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations, co-hosted its annual Lunch & Learn event in celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month. This year's program featured an engaging conversation with Former Providence Mayor Angel Tavares and Family Court Magistrate Aponte Cardona, who shared their journeys, the impact of Latino leadership in Rhode Island, and the importance of representation. The event honored the Hispanic heritage while fostering dialogue about contributions, challenges, family and culture within Rhode Island's vibrant Latino community.

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 and engagement planning in observance of Constitution Day 2025 scheduled on November 14, 2025.
- The 160th Anniversary of the 13th Amendment: The Undeniable History.
- Turning Pages: fifth season planning.

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 December 31, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

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

September 30, 2025.