



COMMITTEE ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC FAIRNESS IN THE RHODE ISLAND COURTS

Third Quarterly Report: September 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, 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. 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

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.

- Planning continues for a trip in January 2027 (Jan. 3-8) that will include 50 law students from Rhode Island and Massachusetts in addition to judicial officers interested in joining the trip.
- The Connecticut Judicial Branch has begun exploring plans for a four-day trip to Montgomery in Spring 2027.
- As a follow up to Judges DuBose and Long's participation in a panel discussion during the Penn State Dickinson Law Antiracist Development Institute's June mini-convening, educators from law schools outside of New England have begun coordinating with [Justice Riders](#) to plan additional law student trips to Alabama.
- Isabel Wilkerson provided the Keynote Presentation at the 2026 District Conference of the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. During the Q & A portion of the luncheon presentation, Judge DuBose and Ms. Wilkerson discussed the impact of the Justice Riders program.

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

RWUSL hosted its annual Social Justice Camp, two weeklong sessions designed for middle school students who are interested in learning more about the importance of law in daily life. Session 1, held July 13-17, 2026, was constructed for children who have not attended Justice Camp

before; campers explored the understandings of justice; how lawyers represent interests of society and individuals; how laws are made and the impact of legislators and social justice advocates; and the role of the courts and judges in protecting justice. Session 2, held July 20-24, 2026, was designed for repeat campers; they participated in activities related to understanding democracy, why elections matter and the history of voting rights. Committee members engaged with presenters and campers at various activities.

RWUSL's Race and Foundations of American Law

On August 18, 2026, Justice Long gave the inaugural lecture for the 2026-2027 academic year in the law school's first-of-its-kind course on race and the law. The first lecture of the academic year centers on race as a social construct and the aim was to demonstrate that race and the law are intertwined – and have been throughout American history – in myriad ways.

Pride 2026 Lunch & Learn for LGBTQIA+ Rights with GLAD's Polly Cozier

On August 31, 2026, the Judiciary held its Pride Month Lunch & Learn event, postponed from June due to scheduling conflicts. Magistrate 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 talked about the evolution of LGBTQ+ law in Rhode Island in recent years. As the GLAD Law lawyer assigned to Rhode Island, Polly has been involved in helping to draft and advocate for legislation in a number of areas including family law, adoption, and health care. These legislative advances aimed to increase equality for all Rhode Islanders, including LGBTQ+ people.

Jury Community Listening Session – Ministers Alliance of R.I

On September 1, 2026, the Ministers Alliance of R.I. (MARI) held a follow-up listening session at the Unity Chapel, hosted by MARI President, Pastor George Farley and community members. The two-hour robust conversation focused on fostering increased participation and amplifying the value of diverse perspectives in the court system, particularly from the Black community, and welcomed feedback on how the judiciary can refine and improve its communications for jury duty.

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 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.
- Outreach and engagement planning in observance of Constitution Day 2026 scheduled on November 13, 2026.
- Turning Pages: sixth season planning.
- February 7, 2027 is the 160th anniversary of Rhode Island's vote to ratify of the landmark 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution. (The Amendment was not fully ratified by 3/4 of the states until July 9, 1868.) As such, the coming year will provide opportunities to consider and reflect upon the historical backdrop of this landmark amendment. The Committee looks forward to collaboration with partners to recognize the critical importance of the 14th Amendment to the struggle for equality and justice.

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, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

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

September 30, 2026.