

Dane County Task Force on Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System

The Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk (County Exec) requested the Dane County Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) to form a Task Force to review the Governor's Commission on Reducing Racial Disparities in the Wisconsin Justice System. The group has been charged with identifying recommendations on a county level incorporating the various offices within the criminal justice system.

The Task Force was appointed by the County Exec in the fall of 2008. Twenty individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds including the Madison Police Department, Dane County Sheriff's Office, Judges, the District Attorney, the Department of Corrections and community based organizations were selected.

The group began meeting in September 2008 and has continued to meet monthly. The mission of the Task Force is to "recommend evidence-based best practices to eliminate racial disparities in the adult criminal justice system of Dane County."

The Task Force divided into five subgroups:

- Data Collection on plea bargaining
- Re-entry and revocation process
- Pre-arrest: Policing practices, racial profiling
- Prosecution alternatives: Community based sentencing alternatives
- Arrest alternatives: Police discretion, programs in localities

The task Force conducted four public hearings. They were held in Sun Prairie, South Madison (Multicultural Center), Allied Drive neighborhood, and Warner Park Recreation Center. The sessions were well attended and individuals came out and shared their stories regarding their experiences in the criminal justice system.

The Task Force has also had presentations on a variety of topics from subject matter experts including Professor Pam Oliver from the University of Wisconsin; Lindsey Draper from the Office of Justice Assistance; John Chisholm the Milwaukee County District Attorney; Brian Blanchard the Dane County District Attorney, Marilyn Walczak, from Justice 2000 and Chief Noble Wray of the Madison Police Department.

Each subgroup will be submitting recommendations by mid June for the entire group to discuss and agree upon. Once they are finalized, they will be submitted to the County Executive, the Dane County Board of Supervisors and the OEO for consideration in the upcoming budget process.