

SPECIAL POPULATIONS WORK GROUP
of the
STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE INITIATIVES

Annual Report
2003-2004

Committee Name: Special Populations Work Group of the Standing Committee on Justice Initiatives

Jurisdiction: The initial charge to the Special Populations Work Group was to “(1) assure that the justice initiatives work of the State Bar is adequately guided by the values expressed in the missions of the Access to Justice Task Force, the Open Justice Commission and by the Task Force on Race/Ethnic and Gender Issues in the Courts and the Legal Profession, and (2) assist in identifying, prioritizing, and completing those projects of the Open Justice Commission that meet the criteria of the Standing Committee on Justice Initiatives.” The Work Group is refining its mission statement as part of its activities this year.

Officers and Membership:

Chair: Charlotte H. Johnson

Members:

Erika L. Butler-Akinyemi
Hon. William J. Caprathe
Ann M. Cooper
Evanne L. Dietz
Dale A. Iverson
Linda D. Johnson
Nelson P. Miller
David M. Stokes
Norris J. Thomas

2002-03 Meeting Schedule (date and location):

All meetings were held at the State Bar of Michigan building, Lansing, MI
December 10, 2003
February 24, 2004
March 23, 2004
June 22, 2004

Committee Activities:

Membership Activities and Benefits: The Special Populations Work Group was formed to carry forward the mission of the Open Justice Commission (OJC) and portions of the Access to Justice Task Force work. It worked closely with the Standing Committee on Justice Initiatives (SCJI) and, through the Work Group Chair, provided input to the justice initiatives restructuring process throughout the year.

The Work Group Chair called the December 2003 meeting to understand the specifics of outstanding OJC work, to understand what work should move forward, and to determine how to prioritize existing work. Following that, the group secured SCJI and Board of Commission approval to:

- Produce and distribute a four volume electronic newsletter addressing issues faced by people with disabilities in the courthouse setting. The newsletters speak to:
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing,
 - Wheelchairs in the Courtroom,
 - Non-lawyer Advocates for People with Cognitive Disabilities, and
 - Low-cost Tips to Make Courthouses User Friendly for People with Disabilities.
- Produce and distribute three juvenile justice booklets on the topics of
 - You. Police. Court: Getting Arrested and Going to Family Court: What Happens Now?
 - Decisions: Your Rights: When You Need to Take Care of Yourself
 - Child Protective and Guardianship Proceedings – A Guide for Parents
- Produce and work with the State Court Administrator’s Office to have the “Commitment to Service” courthouse poster distributed to courts throughout Michigan.

Additionally, the Work Group is in the process of reviewing and restating its mission statement, adopting guiding principles and looking more closely at the definition of “special populations.”

Other activities include attendance by the Chair and staff at the May 2004 National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts Conference.

At the SBM’s upcoming annual meeting, the Work Group hopes to sponsor a program commemorating the 50th anniversary of *Brown v Board of Education*.

Public Policy Initiatives and Positions

The Work Group carefully reviewed the Supreme Court’s revised Keller Administrative Order and the State Bar’s Strategic Plan. It did not take any public policy positions during the year.

Resources Provided by the State Bar of Michigan in Support of Committee Work:

Staff and financial support of the Work Group’s projects were provided throughout the year.

Future Goals and Activities:

It is the intent of this group to continue its work as the “Equal Access Initiative” as provided for in the SCJI Structure Report. In this capacity, it will facilitate equal justice and the elimination/minimization of undue barriers with respect to the administration of justice, as well as entry to and participation in the legal profession and the Bar. The Equal Access Initiative shall, in every aspect of its functioning, focus on “special populations.”

In furtherance of these general goals, the SPW shall assist the Standing Committee on Justice Initiatives (SCJI) with:

- 1) the identification of groups that are underserved by or underrepresented within the justice system or profession, as well as other groups whose members face significant and undue burdens/barriers regarding access to, participation in or equal treatment within the justice system and/or profession;
- 2) identifying, prioritizing and helping move forward to completion programs and projects which might serve to minimize barriers and/or increase access for identified groups. Such programs and projects may include the work of the former Open Justice Commission;
- 3) the identification of actual or potential issues of policy and other matters which might impact special populations segments; and
- 4) serving an advisory role to the SCJI with respect to issues of policy and other matters which might impact special populations segments.

These activities shall be carried out pursuant to SBM by-laws, guidelines, and relevant procedures.

Contact Information:

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