

Minutes of Citizens Advisory Committee on Jury Selection
Friday, August 21, 2009
Brookens Administrative Center, Lyle Shields Meeting Room
1776 E. Washington St., Urbana, Illinois

Call to Order: Chair Ammons called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Conference Call with Paula Hannaford-Agor: Chair Ammons made telephone introductions of Ms. Hannaford-Agor, Director of the Center for Jury Studies, to those members of the CACJS who were present for the initiation of the conference call. The following partially summarizes questions to/answers from Hannaford-Agor and Administrator Holland:

Q: What is the effect of a two-step mailing, in which prospective jurors receive first a Qualification Questionnaire, followed by a Summons to serve?

A: Juror yield usually falls, most significantly among lower socioeconomic status (SES) recipients, who tend to move more frequently or fail to notify postal authorities when they move. Both failures to appear and failures to respond are greatest among lower SES recipients—which correlates to high percentages of persons of color failing to respond/appear (from Hannaford-Agor).

A: Champaign County experienced its lowest return rate (25%) when, instead of a two-step mailing, only the Summons was sent to prospective jurors (from Holland).

Q: Does software exist that randomly selects by Census Tract?

A: Wayne Co., Michigan, and Contra Costa Co., California, have used such software. In Contra Costa, oversampling of Census Tracts that have low response rates has successfully compensated for the low response, but because population shifts are frequent the oversampling must be closely supervised, requiring month-by-month monitoring. Oversampling in Champaign Co. should be undertaken with great caution. Because no Champaign Co. ZIP code has a majority minority population, oversampling could exacerbate the racial disproportion of the jury pool (from Hannaford-Agor).

Q: Do you recommend that Champaign Co. return to the single-mailing approach in order to improve the racial component?

A: This would depend on how you follow up to non-response. The improvement you want could follow, provided you send a second mailing— say, three weeks after the first one. This would have to be a personalized letter that says, “Hey, it’s important that we hear from you,” and communicates the serious consequences of failure to respond. Sending the second piece of mail has resulted in an increase in yield of 24% to 46% (from Hannaford-Agor).

A: When Champaign Co. tried such a second mailing, our response rate barely rose. However, we did not analyze the data from that experience to see what could be learned from those who did respond to the second mailing (from Holland).

A: In the final analysis, you turn to the “long slog” of public education and community outreach to improve the racial component of the jury pool (from Hannaford-Agor).

Approval of Agenda: The agenda was approved as amended by addition of items of New Business and Old Business.

Presentation by Wm Brown (Mapping Summary): [See Mr. Brown's summary (attached).]

Roll Call: Five members appointed from the general public were present for Call to Order: Aaron Ammons, Bill Brown, Brian Dolinar, Joan Miller, Ken Turner. Two members appointed from the general public arrived after Call to Order: Patricia Avery, Jennifer Putman. Three members appointed from the general public were absent: Lorraine Cowart, Barbara Kessel (excused), Patrick Thompson. Two Elected Officials were present: Justice & Social Services Committee Chair Matt Gladney. County Board Chair C. Pius Weibel. Three Court Officials were present: Judge Thomas Difanis, Court Administrator Roger Holland, Public Defender Randy Rosenbaum.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the July 24, 2009 meeting were approved as circulated.

Public Participation: No member of the public was present to address the CACJS.

Juror Qualification Questionnaire (Revisions by Judge Difanis): Administrator Holland distributed copies of the Juror Qualification Questionnaire currently in use, along with (1) copies of the Qualification Questionnaire as revised by Judge Difanis and (2) a letter to prospective jurors written by the Presiding Judge that explains the purposes of the Questionnaire and thanks jurors for their willingness to serve. Difanis and Holland urged CACJS members to review the revised Questionnaire and the letter, and prepare to discuss and propose further revisions of the documents at the next meeting.

Old Business: Judge Difanis reported he is likely able to provide \$900 to underwrite the first installment of paid radio ads.

Schedule Next Meeting: Chair Ammons will poll members regarding preference for meeting dates in September.

Adjournment: Chair Ammons adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Putman
CACJS Secretary