

Barbara Zahler-Gringer:

I am one of the staff counsel to the Commission, Barbara Zahler-Gringer. So in the interim, want to welcome you to this next plenary, which is all about community engagement to identify and address unmet local needs. And I think this is an issue that all of us grapple with. How do you get everybody involved? How do you determine what's at issue and then go about finding the solutions to those issues? So I'm going to turn this over. We're delighted to have Justice Melissa Hart from the Colorado Supreme Court, who's also an ex-officio member of the Colorado Access to Justice Commission. Justice Hart.

Hon. Melissa Hart:

I want to thank you all so much for having me here. As Barbara said, my name is Melissa Hart. My name since I've become a judge is Justice Hart. And I wanted to talk a little bit about the Listen and Learn tour that our statewide Access to Justice Commission did in 2021. We had been hoping to have one, well, actually several. We had been hoping to have a series of regional convenings in person in 2021. And in 2020 we had started planning those but as it became clear that that was not going to be realistic in light of the pandemic. We said, "Well, we can't just put it off until we can get together in person. We really need to hear what communities need and be thinking about what we can do to help. And just saying only after things open is losing precious time." So we put together a statewide tour, in think quotes, "tour", because it was by Zoom in each of our state's 22 judicial districts.

The tour involved 41 sessions altogether, with at least one visit and generally two and sometimes three to any given judicial district depending on size. One of the things I think we can all acknowledge is that we learned a lot about the pros and cons of Zoom. During the pandemic, we decided that we would have one face of the Commission using up one Zoom box so that the community members in any given community could be the other faces and voices in the conversation. So I was the face of the Commission for those 41 sessions. And the other commissioners who are interested would participate in the background, participate as observers rather than on screen. Which meant that it wasn't just me recording what I experienced from the conversations, it was a large group recording what they experienced from the conversations, what they thought was important. But again, we didn't want to use up screen time with commissioner faces.

The other thing we wanted, and I think this is key to the topic of this morning's panel about community engagement, is we've been recognizing more and more, and I think all of us working in this access to justice world have been recognizing more and more, that when lawyers are the only people talking about the problems and the solutions, we end up coming up with a narrow set of problems and a narrow set of solutions because we're looking at it through our lawyer-informed eyes. So although there were certainly lawyers involved, lawyers and judges, we were careful to include people from within the judicial department as well as legal aid lawyers and others who were actively involved in access to justice. But we also said we want to be sure that we have at least as many non-lawyer community partners as lawyers involved to the extent that we can. So we aggressively reached out to other kinds of community partners and we did that in a few ways.

Some of it was just brainstorming. So every single jurisdiction we visited, we invited the local public libraries to come talk. We kind of went through and said, "Okay, we want to talk to organizations that work with those living without homes. We want to talk to organizations working with domestic violence survivors. We want to talk to organizations in the healthcare field. What we wanted to do was to see what are you as non-legal NGOs experiencing with your client base? What are they telling you that they're missing in trying to access the justice system?" So again, there was sort of a big brainstorm of

let's just try to find everyone we can in these particular areas. And then as well, we reached out to the legal aid lawyers in each jurisdiction and to the local access to justice committees and said who are the leaders in your communities, non-law leaders in your communities who might have something to share with us about this question of how the justice is working to serve or isn't working for the people in need in your communities.

It was a really great experience. We learned a lot. I would say very little was completely surprising. That it confirmed a lot of the things that I and others had suspected were some of the biggest challenges with accessing the legal system. But it was really helpful to have concrete examples and to hear some different ideas for solutions. And I would say we came out of our sessions with the big takeaways. The big challenges that were consistently identified were language access or rather lack of language access, that we need to do a better job of providing access to people who don't speak English. And then as sort of a side point, providing plain language English access, so less legalese to the extent that we can make that happen. So language access was one of the big ones here in Colorado and I'm sure this is true in New York. Well, I know it's true.

In New York you've got a number of big cities that have public transportation, that have, I'll call it reasonable, internet access. But then you have large swaths of the community and again, this is true in Colorado. During the pandemic, many people said, "Ah, ah, we've discovered that tech is going to be the answer. We've discovered that virtual proceedings are going to be the answer." Virtual proceedings work well if your broadband access is good and if you have the necessary devices, but they don't work at all, if you don't have those things. If you can't sign on, then the fact that you don't have to go to the courthouse is sort of meaningless. And one of the things we really learned is that in our communities that have the least access to transportation, they also have the worst access to internet connectivity.

And so what you think could be a solution to the one ends up not being a solution at all because those communities are left out in both respects. And so we identified that as something that even though it doesn't sound justice related initially, it's so fundamental to justice. The final thing I think we heard in every community was the fear that people have of the courts and the need to provide access points that are not in the courts for any of a number of reasons that I won't get into. But I think really important for some of what you're going to hear from my co-panelists, libraries.

Libraries are trusted still. They are considered to be information hubs and I think they are information hubs. It's a place that people do turn to ask questions to try to get answers. And so we have really expanded our efforts as a judicial system to partner with libraries to think about how we can create access to justice opportunities there. And I think I have gone over my time, I apologize if I have, but I'm going to stop there. Thank you so much.

Kim Diana Connolly:

So it's an honor to finally welcome all of you to the panel on the importance of community engagement to identify and address local unmet needs. And we have three amazing presenters, you've already heard from one of them. And today we are hearing from these experts and then getting some questions from other people who are in the field, who are on the front lines of community work with innovative and effective approaches. As I met with our presenters to prepare, I have learned that these three people are literally in the thick of things when it comes to ensuring that community voices are heard and designing ways to make our access to justice efforts more effective and more equitable. So you're going to hear more from the other two presenters about logistics, working with partners, the importance of design.

You heard all that, but I think you started to hear what I've already heard from them, vision, and dedication on multiple levels. So let me just take a brief moment to introduce the three panelists, one of whom you've already heard of. Justice Hart has been a justice on the Colorado Supreme Court for the past five years. And as you heard, is a passionate advocate for access to justice for several decades. Next, we're going to be hearing from August Hieber, they/them, Senior Program Manager, Inclusive Access, at the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts, staffing the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice Community Trust and Disability Access Committees.

And has previously created and done extensive training in LGBTQ+ cultural responsiveness. And has drafted and advocated for state and county level policies to reduce disparities and promote equitable futures for LGBTQ communities in Illinois. And then after that, you will hear from Sue Ludington, she/her, who's served as the Chief Law Librarian for the New York State Unified Court System who brings decades of experience working in public access law libraries and providing, I'm sorry, direct service to a wide variety of patrons, many of whom are self-represented. And we heard from the last panel how important this type of thing is. So I am now going to turn it over with no further ado to August. Thank you very much.

August Hieber:

Thank you so much, Kim Diana. And I'm going to set a timer because I am known for just talking away, getting lost in the moment. For those of you on the call who I do not know, which is very, very many of you, my name is August Hieber. My pronouns are they/them. I'm the Senior Program Manager of Inclusive Access at the AOIC and I have a short presentation to share with you today. I'm going to be discussing a particular committee of our Commission on Access to Justice here in Illinois, the Community Trust Committee. So give me one moment, let me share my screen. So I'm here today to talk to you about the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice Community Trust Committee. And I'm going to talk through three different points related to this committee.

We're going to talk about the different ways that the Community Trust Committee listens to communities, and we have taken up three different projects that I'm going to describe today. The first is how we went about structuring the membership of the committee itself. The second section is going to cover our Justice for All funded Listening Sessions that we've conducted with four community partners around Illinois. And then the final piece I'm going to discuss is our community navigator collaboration with an organization called Illinois Access to Justice, which is a funder of legal services for community-based orgs across Illinois.

So to kind of illustrate who the committee is, I put together a little timeline to kind of situate us in where we are today. So the committee was first established in 2017 as an arm of the Commission on Access to Justice. And it was established with a charge to do what the name entails, to promote the community's trust in the court system. And some of the very first activities that this committee took up involved Listening Sessions, in a town hall style sort of collection, at three different sites in Markham, Illinois. One was at the courthouse that's located in Markham. And two were located at different community-based sites around the community. And through that feedback we learned a lot about what experiences the court are like for community members in Markham. And one of the things that we took away from that was recognizing that we need our systems to be closer to community to really hear what community has to say. So in 2020, we restructured the Community Trust Committee and opened an application style process for anyone who is on board with making court systems better for communities.

And so previously our membership included only attorneys from around the state and we invited all of the former community members to reapply and also open the application to stakeholders all over the state. So now the committee has public librarians, community navigators, attorneys, legal professionals who are not attorneys. We have diversified the membership of the committee to make sure it's more reflective of communities across Illinois to bring those experiences closer to the commission itself. So that's kind of point number one. The second thing I want to talk about are our Justice for All Listening Sessions. This is that second activity that I described that we've taken up.

So to highlight the importance of hearing from communities, the Community Trust Committee took up a grant that's funded through Justice for All and identified four community partners, three in Chicago and one in Rock Island, Illinois. Each partner organization has executed an MOU and receives funds to host participants from community members associated with the organization for feedback sessions and to compensate participants for their time and input. So not only is this grant enabling us to compensate the organizations for their time, we're also able to then disperse funds to participants for their time as well, leading to a very enmeshed, a more equitable experience when we're hearing and collecting feedback from community members.

So each partner org has agreed in the MOU to host two to three sessions, with around 20 participants each, focusing on highlighted areas. So far, we've identified two areas that we've dedicated the listening sessions to and are continuing to design and expand our understanding of what information these listening sessions can bring us. So to kind of exemplify what this looks like, we have worked with a local church to host a testing session for one of our statewide forms related to minor guardianship. We invited community members through the church to come to the session even if they had no experience related to minor guardianship because we wanted to hear not just from practitioners who have reviewed the form in our institutionalized process of forms testing and review, but we wanted to hear from the community members themselves about their experience with the form because that's who we're designing for. These forms are designed for people who don't have attorneys. It made the most sense to get feedback about these forms from the people who would be using them the most.

The second focus that we highlighted were listening to the experiences of survivors of intimate partner violence at court by working with another community-based organization. We conducted three sessions, two with survivors and one with court advocates. And this focus has resulted in a preliminary report that we're beginning to draft that summarizes the findings of this qualitative data that was collected from different staff in the Access to Justice Division at the AOIC. And it's going to be shared with appropriate court stakeholders for future action. So what we're doing is identifying trusted community-based organizations who then identify community members who are compensated for their time.

And then we take that feedback, consolidate, and anonymize the qualitative information shared with us, and then disperse that feedback to relevant court entities. And that process brings community feedback directly to court stakeholders. So that's kind of section number two.

And then the final activity that we take up is the Community Navigator Collaboration. So there is an MOU that we executed between our Commission and Illinois Access to Justice. The Illinois Access to Justice is a statewide program focused on promoting access to legal services in historically marginalized communities and was first started in 2019. Community-based organizations that support these communities across Illinois are then invited to apply to Illinois Access to Justice, to either provide direct legal services or fund folks who serve as community navigators.

And I'm going to go back to the slide in a minute. We're going to talk about the navigators first. So what is this program? So Illinois Access to Justice Funds 425 navigators who are embedded at 37 community-based organizations serving people impacted by court involvement. Those community-based organizations could be social service agencies, community-based programs, churches and especially libraries. Community navigators are trained to help people navigate complex systems by providing legal information, similar to our JusticeCorps program where navigators are embedded in courthouses across Illinois and provide legal information to people who do not have attorneys. And community navigators act as a connector from communities to services. They provide outreach, education, document preparation and navigation and assistance to Illinois' marginalized communities.

And so when we were describing how the Commission wanted to address this program and how to work with it, we were charged through the Chicago Bar Association/Chicago Bar Foundation Task Force on the Sustainable Practice of Law and Innovation to recognize a new Community Justice Navigator model built off the success of Illinois JusticeCorps in the courts. So this was a directive that came from the court. And the Community Trust Committee reviewed the existing landscape and determined that we would not create a new registry or a new navigator program, but would instead collaborate with existing community navigators through Illinois Access to Justice, to further facilitate connections between community and the courts and provide advice and enhance existing programs.

So instead of supplanting community-based judgment and creating a new program, we decided to work with these navigators and provide the following training: training modules dedicated to going to court; training modules dedicated to understanding and completing an e-filing statewide forms; and, then finally, information about how to leverage court-based resources, like JusticeCorps, like the Court Navigator Network, and on subject specific resources. Finally, the goal of this work with community is to connect court information and resources to the community served by an existing navigator network in Illinois Access to Justice. We also hope to promote community trust in courts, financing transparency, accessibility of information and knowledge of process across communities.

And finally, the ultimate goal that is built upon all of this work, everything from the listening sessions to the restructuring of our committee membership to the support of this particular program that already exists, the goal is to empower communities to address legal issues, especially for those who don't have an attorney. I'm going to stop sharing my screen after I get back to this. Here I am. My face again, I just wanted to thank you so much for your time. You're going to hear so much in a moment about the importance of law librarians and that was a running theme through all of this work that Community Trust Committee has taken up. So thank you so much for your time and it was a blast sharing some of the work that we've done here. Thank you.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you, August. It is so exciting to hear what's going on in Illinois as a great model. And so now I love that you are doing a shout-out to librarians because we are going to be hearing more about the excellent work of Sue and so take it away.

Sue Ludington:

Thank you. Good morning. My name is Sue Ludington. I am the Chief Law Librarian for the New York State Unified Court System. I oversee the Office of Legal Information, which we provide support, excuse me, operational support, and consultation services for the trial court law libraries statewide and the employees who work in those spaces. I held this position for just over a year. Prior to this, I worked for a decade in Oregon county law libraries and directly interacted with public patrons, 75% of whom were

non-attorneys. This direct face-to-face engagement with the public, those who could find a law library anyway, was often quite revealing of the community's unmet legal needs in and of itself. And as I engage with our UCS law librarians around the state, I know this continues to be a typical practice.

However, I want to talk today about partnerships between public law libraries and regular public libraries because the working relationships between these two entities naturally forms a kind of community outreach and getting firsthand knowledge of the pressing legal needs by the public. You see why many people are intimidated to go to the courthouse unless absolutely necessary. It's well established that public libraries are viewed as natural, excuse me, mutual agencies that are welcoming and have knowledgeable people who want to help. Law libraries without reservation consider public libraries their colleagues and through active partnership with them can become privy to recurring questions and legal problems that many members, particularly of underserved communities, are dealing with.

And from there, law libraries and court staff can collaborate to create how-to guides, referral resource lists and other practical tools. I'm going to share a few examples from some of our law libraries, and I'll probably do this quickly because I had just noticed the time and I want to make sure we have enough time for the rest of our speakers. You've heard about a lot of examples with libraries and I'm just so proud to continue the tradition here. Up in the 5th JD, Judicial District, staff at the Onondaga County Supreme Court Law Library have played an instrumental role in the process of establishing a VCAN site located at the Onondaga County Public Library, Central Library, in Syracuse.

In addition to the Central Library, they also have 10 other locations in public libraries and family resource centers around Syracuse, as well as five additional locations in other counties in that JD. As Judge Zayas referenced earlier, VCANs or Virtual Court Access Networks, help bridge the digital divide by providing remote access to courts in a convenient community location that allow users to file documents, respond to notices, appear in court virtually, and acquire some legal assistance. Law librarians have helped train public library staff on court processes, common self-represented litigant tasks, and legal problems, and of course how to use and troubleshoot the equipment. From our Principal Law Librarian up there, she says, "The rural county locations are all in towns other than the court to help users with transportation challenges."

Some of the feedback we can collect from users and public librarians helps to determine possible expansions to the program. For example, in cases where the VCAN location is actually farther than the courthouse from the litigant, we can see a problem wherein litigants that need to appear virtually are expected to go through the VCAN program to facilitate their appointment. But sometimes the location itself is not practical just due to its distance. Library staff in the law library track where and how often this happens to inform future decisions about possible expansions to the VCAN program up there in the 5th Judicial District. Through this partnership and resulting dialogue with librarian colleagues, law library employees can glean important insights into common unmet legal information needs and other barriers to the justice system that librarians have heard from their public patrons.

In turns, our law librarians are inspired to craft resource guides, programs and trainings that will help librarians further access to justice in their own institutions. For example, up in the 6th JD, the Principal Law Librarian was instrumental in recently developing and conducting their first lawyer in the library program, which in this instance was a topical presentation where an attorney from the Third Department presented a general talk on guardianship proceedings. This has been a noted area where people need legal assistance and understanding the complexity of these legal actions can be a very

heavy lift. By offering programs like this, speaking in general terms and language that's accessible by the general public and reviewing basic rights, limitations and procedures on this and similar topics, law libraries and court leaders can become aware of extended or supplementary legal matters that are impacting the public.

Programs like these reflect an iterative process by which we respond to frequent legal reference questions framed to us by public librarians and we in turn create things like these public programs that seem relevant to our local communities. In these programs, we have a captive audience and they are not afraid to frequently describe their own personal legal problem stories. And those professionals that are in attendance on occasion have an opportunity to act or at least respond in a way that may be meaningful to those attendees. In the 8th Judicial District, the Supreme Court Library at Buffalo is just a few blocks from the local public library. So there's frequent back and forth referral and consultation with each other.

The Principal Law Librarian there says, "In addition to making connection with the public library staff, by introducing our services and resources, we have conducted trainings in order to give them some reliable tools that they can use to assist patrons." Such topics they've covered include the New York State court structure, which we all know can be very confusing, the UCS CourtHelp webpages and Do-It-Yourself or DIY forms, and the Buffalo Law Library's website with links to such things as the local municipal codes. Libraries also provided handouts for court recesses as well as their own in-house referral guide that they've created. Developing this intentional reciprocal relationship with public library staff is crucial for law libraries and by extension the courts themselves to have continued understanding of the unmet legal needs in the community.

And lastly, in the 9th JD, court leaders have been able to recently add a full-time law librarian in Troy in the Rensselaer Supreme and County Court Law Library. And one of the first things he did was connect with staff at the Troy Public Library, which conveniently is right down the street. He inquired, "What is the single greatest legal information need that your staff is hearing about today?" He learned that applications for small claims court matters and related actions was at the top of their list. And consequently, he is now pursuing ways in which he might be able to provide resources and possibly training to these public libraries. Actions which will help these folks be in a better position to respond and help the public.

We have other examples around the country, experiences from myself, including other programs, adult programs, held within the public library setting on things like landlord/tenant law or estate administration. There's also there in the library, programs in another setting where you have one-on-one legal consultations and library staff are often instrumental in helping to set up those appointments with users who need to get some legal advice. So those were the things that I wanted to share about our law libraries and what we're doing to help with community engagement and further the court's understanding of what the unmet legal needs are in the state of New York. So I will then turn it back over to Kim Diana.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you so much for sharing that exciting thing. I've always loved librarians and libraries and now have reasons to love them even more. Thank you so much. Because we have so many of you and so many others in the community doing additional, amazing community engagement work in the thick of things, we have interventions from other experts. So I'm going to ask brief questions of a few other people so you hear some of the other great things that are happening. I'm going to start with Judge

Cheryl Joseph. Hello. So Judge Joseph is the Supervising Judge of the Matrimonial Parts for Suffolk County Supreme Court. Judge Joseph, when you decided to hold a Listening Session on family law, how did you identify the partners that you wanted to be at the table and what issues did you particularly want to address through the listening session?

Hon. Cheryl Joseph:

Thank you so much and it's a pleasure to be here. Really the issue for us was legal representation in Family Court and matrimonial proceedings, but it was those individuals who didn't qualify for Legal Aid or an 18B attorney that we were trying to target, but they couldn't afford private counsel. So I reached out to the supervising judge of the Family Court, at the time was James Quinn and is now Caren Loguercio. And we identified some legal service providers that we were familiar with, such as Nassau Suffolk Legal Services and what was VIBS, which was our domestic violence providers to start. And through meeting with them, and also Touro Law School, I shouldn't forget Touro, they had a clinic and provided legal services in the community on a limited basis utilizing their law students.

So we started there and then it grew because providers identify other providers and we had a Stakeholders Meeting to begin to identify those service providers that could help us with divorces, custody, child support, domestic violence, and it started to grow from there. So our hope is to continue to identify providers in the community and to also figure out how best to serve that population. And then our hope is to grow to other areas such as housing, landlord/tenant, and the like.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you very much. That was really wonderful to hear. So exciting. Let's hear now from Madeleine Petrara. Madeleine?

Madeleine Petrara:

Yes, I'm coming. Can you hear me?

Kim Diana Connolly:

There you go. No, no, I know you have instantaneously [inaudible] all these buttons.

Madeleine Petrara:

Good morning, everybody. On behalf of Nassau County, thank you for having us. So I'm going to answer I guess a similar question that you had asked to Judge Joseph. And we also came to a consumer debt clinic here in Nassau County, and it was an actually in a roundabout way. The District Court here in Nassau, the jurisdiction is typically landlord/tenant matters, small claim matters, misdemeanors, and obviously in these, consumer debt cases. It's truly the People's Court as you would say. So in the People's Court, most of these people, well, we use the term self-represented, I would say they're actually underrepresented. The majority of the consumer debt cases are the underrepresented litigants.

So with them, and given the change in the law that Danielle had talked about earlier as well as Anna, Judge DeStefano, the Administrative Judge for the Courts of Nassau County, realized that maybe we should be putting our resources and doing something in Nassau for these consumer debt cases and these underrepresented litigants. So Judge DeStefano reached out to somebody at St. John's Law School where they already had an existing consumer debt clinic. We had numerous meetings with St. John's, they were actually very busy and they thought they could only give us a couple of days a month to be in Nassau County. And it was too much a part of the caseload that we didn't think those was enough days in the court to help these underrepresented litigants.

So they told us that Nassau Suffolk Law Services here in Long Island, which is actually a not-for-profit public interest law firm, that they were actually looking to do something with their consumer debt cases and they were bringing on an attorney to handle it a 100 percent. So then we had numerous meetings with the Nassau Suffolk Law Services and then it just took off. But what was key in implementing and in the success of this consumer debt clinic in Nassau, which now we have attorneys there three days a week, what was key is that in all of our formative meetings, we had the three consumer debt judges on those meetings. They played really a pivotal role because they said what would work or wouldn't work, how they do their calendar.

So working with them, it opened up in February, and we see about three new cases each time there's an appearance in court. And then we have all the adjourned cases that had been previously on, so they could be anywhere to ten cases a day that Nassau Law Services is helping these underrepresented litigants I would say. And we would not be able to have done that without the consumer debt judges being on board and working with us and allowing supplemental affirmations and affidavits and working with the attorneys to help these litigants. So I guess that's about it.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you for that report. That is such important work. Really, really-

Madeleine Petrara:

Thank you.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Right, so now we're going to hear from Carla Palumbo, the President, and CEO of the Legal Aid Society of Rochester, who was an initial co-chair of the Community Justice Council in the 7th Judicial District covering Rochester and surrounding counties. And so Carla's going to talk about the groups that are represented on the council and how it is determined what issues will be addressed.

Carla Palumbo:

Thank you, Kim. Hi everybody. I'm happy to talk a little bit about our Community Justice Council. Community Justice Council's one of the five working groups that grew out of our Justice for All initiative. I'm currently the Co-chair of the Leadership Advisory Committee of the Justice for All initiative. The Community Justice Council focuses on community-identified justice system issues. So what we look at, what we examine comes from input from the community. Our input, our output is our answers to that or the discussions that we have with community members. There are about, I would say, 70 members to the Community Justice Council. They were identified through the Leadership Advisory Committee and then they were identified by members of the Community Justice Council suggesting that others join us.

They include individual members of the community, leaders, nonprofit groups that represent many segments of the community healthcare, religious institutions, providers of children and adult services. We have members from the educational institutions in the area, including our community college that hosts us and hosts our meetings. Government is represented including the Department of Human Services, different aspects of the city government, Rochester Police Department, public defender, district attorney, and legal organizations including all the legal service providers, some private legal providers, and, of course, the judicial system.

We meet every quarter, every couple of months, and generally keep an open meeting. We may be presenting certain aspects or we listen to the questions or to the issues that our communities bring to us, and then we either refer them to one of the other working groups or to the appropriate segment of the judicial system to help resolve some issues. Some examples are really early on it became very evident that we needed improved access for deaf and hard of hearing folks in the community and especially in the court system. So we created an ombudsman and video-based court information program to assist with that. Issues regarding tenant defense were raised early on that then led to ultimately the creation of the Tenant Defense Project, which is a collaborative of all the legal services providers providing assistance in housing and eviction legal matters.

A lot of questions came up regarding the criminal court system, the district attorney, the public defender. We held two sessions with open question and answer periods with both the public defender's office and the district attorney's office so that community members could get those questions out there, could talk, get a better understanding of the criminal justice system, air their issues regarding the criminal justice system. So where we are now is we've done a little bit of strategic planning. We're looking to expand our community representation based on areas that have come up so that we reach out to specific community groups that we think we want to hear from or that may have questions for us.

We are interested in creating community ambassadors, bringing the Community Justice Council out into the community instead of just having meetings where people come to us, taking our listening and going out into the community to talk to folks. And then finally, really working a little bit more on communications to make sure that we are available to people that need or that have issues that they need to bring to the judicial system. I think that answers the questions.

Kim Diana Connolly:
Thank you.

Carla Palumbo:
You're welcome.

Kim Diana Connolly:
That is so great. That's really wonderful. And finally, we are going to hear as these interveners are going to be offering us things. Well first of all, I want to say we might have a couple of minutes at the end for a couple quick questions. We're also going to ask our original three speakers to come back and do one closing sentence. So while Christy Bass is giving her ideas, original speakers, come back with a closing sentence, but we will have a little bit of time for maybe one or two questions. Right now we have Christy Bass, the District Executive in the 3rd Judicial District, who's going to be talking about Clergy Days and the goals of Clergy Days there.

Christy Bass:
Thank you so much for having me and good morning to everybody. I'd like to send some well wishes to Judge Richardson-Mendelson. She was in our district yesterday eagerly awaiting the birth of this grand baby. We were at Albany Pride, so we're just sending best wishes to her and her family this morning. Very exciting. So I wanted to talk a little bit about Faith Leaders Day. Prior to COVID, we successfully had two in-person events where we invited faith leaders of local communities together to have lunch. And initially we presented to them sort of our resources and what we could provide their constituents. Our thought was they're on the frontline dealing with families and people in crisis just like the courts are. So

maybe there's something we're missing. Maybe they can help us identify gaps in services community needs. Post-COVID we had a little... COVID sort of changed how we communicate and how we gather.

And especially in this community, we've not successfully had in-person, but more digital meetings and communications with our faith leaders across the district. They're a wealth of information and they're directly connected with families and communities. And our goal, besides identifying gaps and services and ways we can help fill them, is also to recruitment for hiring, to recruit more diverse workforce. So they're dealing with these families one on one. They're part of our network for recruitment in that we send out job announcements, the exam schedule and testing. And we've also done some presentations on how the civil service system works and how you can get a job in the court system. Because we are one of the best kept secrets, I tell everybody in regard to employment in the state.

So this group has really been critical in meeting these needs and they're really excellent partners to have. I would encourage anybody to reach out to them and try to include them in your work. They're really integral to our work every day and we're available if anybody has any questions at any point in time.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you very much. So now I'd love to have the three original presenters come back on camera. Thank you. And so I would love for you to... One thing that maybe you didn't talk about, in closing and reflecting on these other ideas as well and hearing all of your stories. What might you do differently in your listening sessions or your preparations for your... What might you do differently based on what you've learned today? And then whatever else you want to say in closing. Although if you go really quickly, then we might have time for questions, although nobody has posted anything other than asking, will the recording exist? And yes, the recording will be available. So I'm going to turn it over. Who would like to start? We don't need to still go in the same order. Do you need me to call on one of you?

Hon. Melissa Hart:

I'll go ahead and go.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you. Thank you, Justice Hart.

Hon. Melissa Hart:

I don't know if it's something I would do differently. I'm sure we could have done better, but I think we tried to do... Listening to these speakers causes me to reflect, which is so important to reach outside of the law and to ask for help and guidance and to be humble and about the limitations that come with thinking in a lawyer's mindset. One of the things we didn't do, just reflecting on the very last person who spoke, is we didn't involve clergy in our Listening Tour. So that is something I would do differently. I think clergy is an essential space for reaching the public, and we've already talked about libraries. But I just think recognizing that there are vast areas of the expertise outside of the law that have to be brought to bear on this challenge.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you. August?

August Hieber:

It's like me and Sue going back and forth. I'm like, "Who's going to unmute first?" The big takeaway that I have gotten from all of this wonderful work and being able to contextualize what we've been trying to do in Illinois with what has been happening all over the place. This isn't just listening, these aren't just listening sessions. These are active listening sessions. And I think the distinction is you can listen and hear from communities all day, but what really matters and what we've seen from all of these speakers is what systems change results when we actively listen to communities. And what I've heard from everyone is that there is a plan for the use of this qualitative data and it is reflective in a commitment to lifting up the community-based experience. And I think what I am so happy and honored to recognize is that in a lot of these situations and from all these speakers today, we are actively listening. And I think that's just the important takeaway that I was really left with.

Sue Ludington:

So I guess that leaves me, and I am not sure how much more I will add. You've heard a lot about libraries and I think we all are in agreement how relevant they are in helping the courts understand what the legal needs of the community are, or at least having some insight into that. I will say that certainly we admire establishing focus groups and these listening sessions. I can tell you that last fall we did try and do this a little bit to try and get some public access law library patrons who had been active in court matters to participate in listening sessions. And we really struggled to get these users to either want to speak to us openly about that, or maybe it was timing. I mean, there are all kinds of different issues that might come into play about that.

But understanding that while that is an important part, and certainly we would continue to try and aspire to help facilitate those opportunities, our regular interactions with patrons on a daily basis, that's often our community engagement. And that's often what propels us to then act. Whether it's creating, like I said, resource guides or developing referral lists that are useful right in our own local communities. And I think exactly what August said, it's not just listening, but what do you do with that information once you know what it's all about. So those I think would be the last things that I would contribute. I certainly did hear a lot from all of you and I don't know that if... I continue to be open to ideas about how libraries can continue to make things better and expand further. So please do reach out if you want to entertain any conversation.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you. Thank you. So one of the reasons that I was chosen to moderate this panel is I get to work with amazing students at the University at Buffalo School of Law in the community engagement... Oh, don't go away, you three speakers. I'm going to ask you, remember I said a final closing question, so you can just stay there. But I get to work with amazing student attorneys and colleagues in the law school and we're engaging in the community. And one of the things that we created was this #UBLawResponds, we have a clinic where somebody comes up with a great idea, but we're not going to create a whole new clinic, but we want to do a project. We have a space that that can happen in and students can be on the ground doing something.

And rather than the time that usually takes to create this, and this is something that we've created, and that we're loving the fact that students are leaning into suddenly doing something new. And we're doing everything from appeals on a very, very personal level within schools all the way to Western District of New York cases. Because sometimes you need to do things really differently. And so that's one of the things that we heard when we were listening to both our Western New York and other communities and our students. And so we now have this thing called the Community Engagement Legal Clinic, which can kind of pivot and be available to do what happened, rather than the other clinic that I work with, the

Environmental Advocacy clinic, which does great and amazing environmental stuff. So that's one of the things that I'm really proud of.

So I want to go back to the Chief Judge's. . . One of the really important things that I took immediate notes on when the Chief Judge says, "This is called a stakeholders meeting, but it should be called, what was it?, "A most interested people meeting." And I guess what I'm also hearing is you all are reaching out to other stakeholders, but how do we use the lessons that we've got here today to think about more broadly of how do we get other people who should be stakeholders interested in connecting with us? How do we create a space that we're involving truly great stakeholders in this? And can you just do one sentence on that? And it can be a sentence because I haven't prepped you for that question of, "Gosh, I'll need to look into that," but you can also have some other thoughts. Thank you.

August Hieber:

I think I'll go ahead on an immediate thought. I think something that we have learned a lot through our listening sessions, especially with survivors of intimate partner violence. The most universal stakeholder in a lot of these court systems are the court users themselves. And I think if you can position and empower just your everyday member of the community to say no, like this forum is for you, you have a stake in this forum. If you frame your listening sessions in the sense that any person could be a stakeholder, because any person could be a court user, it really amplifies what you can do with that voice. So I would say changing maybe your perception of who a stakeholder is and making it even as granular as just the individual is a helpful way of being like, "Well, all feedback from many sources can be incorporated when framed in this context."

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you. August. Other thoughts?

Sue Ludington:

I guess I would just contribute to say that, I mean, the library world is... In my entire library career, which includes tenures as a public librarian before moving into law librarianship, we've always looked to partners. We never have enough money. So we're always looking to share resources and make use of the best that's at our disposal. So for example, when I was still in Lane County in Oregon, I did a grant project. There was an organization called the Springfield Eugene Tenant Association. And so it was a renters rights organization. And so being aware of those different community groups, and I know they're all over depending on what their focus might be, and really making sure you actively go out and establish those partnerships.

I did a lot of that footwork myself because I recognized we're seeing a lot of the same people. We got this grant and we developed a great website with lots of legal information and we translated that information into Spanish in order to expand our reach. So yes, I think there are lots of partners out there, not the least of which are different nonprofit organizations serving specific legal needs.

Hon. Melissa Hart:

I guess I'll just say as is true, I think, in all of life. It is true in this context that developing partnerships requires an acknowledgement that you have a lot to learn from them and an offer that you would like to help them. Rather than approaching it with, "I can help you. I've got it, let me give it to you." What can we learn from each other, how can we help each other approach, I think is really essential.

Kim Diana Connolly:

Thank you, thank you, thank you. So I want everyone to give a virtual round of applause to our three main speakers and our four interveners. And it was an honor to learn so much from all of you today. Thank you very much.

Hon. Melissa Hart:

Thank you, Kim Diana, and thank you everyone.

Sue Ludington:

Thank you.