

Diversity in Action

How the NCJFCJ is prioritizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Presented by Judge Wenona C. Belton

Prepared by Danielle Whittaker, Judicial Staff Attorney



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

What is the NCJFCJ?

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is the oldest judicial membership organization in the country and provides all judges, courts, and related agencies involved with juvenile, family, and domestic violence cases with the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of the families and children who seek justice.

A History of Georgia NCJFCJ Presidents

est. 1937



1982-1983
The Honorable Aaron Cohn



1988-1989
The Honorable Romae T. Powell



2010-2011
The Honorable R. Michael Key



2014-2015
The Honorable Peggy Walker

Compassion · Leadership · Education · Community

Mission Statement

The mission of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is to provide all judges, courts, and related agencies involved with juvenile, family, and domestic violence cases with the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of the families and children who seek justice.

Vision Statement

The vision of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is for a society in which every family and child has access to fair, equal, effective, and timely justice.

Diversity Statement

NCJFCJ is committed to diversity in every aspect of its composition and in performing its mission. Diversity in the judiciary is vital to upholding public trust and confidence in the legal system. Diversity in this context refers to communities and individuals who are identified by race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, age, or disability status. To achieve its mission and promote diversity, the NCJFCJ asserts its commitment to diversity through the following principles:

- The NCJFCJ will recruit membership and leadership which reflects the diversity of the children and families we serve.
- The NCJFCJ will provide educational and training programs, publications, and policy positions that are relevant and culturally-sensitive.
- National policy and standards developed by the NCJFCJ affecting courts will promote and encourage judges to be knowledgeable of diversity issues.
- The NCJFCJ will engage in recruitment practices and retention strategies to achieve a diverse team.

NCJFCJ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Video



When was the DEI Collaborative initiated?

Pioneered by the NCJFCJ Diversity Committee, the DEI Collaborative emerged in **2017** after equity and inclusion were identified as the number one strategic priority of the organization.

After that meeting, the NCJFCJ updated its Diversity Statement and implemented a Diversity Action Plan for the years **2018-2023**.

The DEI hosted its first summit in July 2019 and has re-convened each year during the NCJFCJ Annual Conference.

What are the goals of DEI?

The mission of the DEI Collaborative is to identify, design and implement coordinated actions between its member organizations.

These actions seek to build a **diverse, inclusive, and culturally competent** bench and legal profession, which includes all contributors to court operations.

Who are the participants?

Through NCJFCJ's collaborative effort, the participating entities include a wide-range of court staff including **judges, attorneys, court management and staff, mental health professionals**, and others who share in the mission of improving and delivering new, effective, and culturally relevant court outcomes for the communities we serve.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

NCJFCJ's Diversity Action Plan

Helpful Tools & Resources

“Addressing the overrepresentation of children and families of color in our juvenile courts requires careful consideration and reform of the policies and practices that drive bias and structural racism.”

Addressing Bias

in Delinquency and
Child Welfare Systems

Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Juvenile and Family Courts is Critical to Creating a Fair and Equitable System of Justice for All Youth.

A. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Juvenile Court¹

Eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile and family courts is critical to creating a fair and equitable system of justice for all youth. While the number of youth who come into formal contact with the court system has declined in recent years, little progress has been made in reducing racial and ethnic disparities.²

Wisconsin, Montana, Delaware, Connecticut, and Massachusetts Native youth “were three times as likely to be incarcerated white youth,” while Latino youth “were 65 percent more to be detained or committed” than white youth.⁷

A Guide on Using Language in Juvenile Court

“The words we choose have a significant impact on the young people we serve and can also impact our own thinking and decision-making”



Juvenile court can be a stressful environment—for everyone. But for court-involved youth, it can also be embarrassing, confusing, and traumatic.

Youth may fail to meet adults' expectations to be respectful and compliant or to show empathy and remorse. Youth may be rude and disrespectful, talk back, refuse to make eye contact, laugh, or otherwise appear uninterested. Despite our best intentions, we may aggravate the stress and trauma that court-involved youth experience. We may misunderstand the behavior we see and use harmful language based on faulty assumptions and expectations.

It is important for us to be mindful of the developmental capacities of young people. The behaviors we may perceive as disrespect, defiance, or lack of contrition are often manifestations of normal adolescent development or trauma. Because adolescence is a complex and rapidly changing period of growth, we must consider the developmental context of each youth and identify any layers of disability and trauma the young person may face.

The words we choose have a significant impact on the young people we serve. We may inadvertently use language laden with bias, disapproval, and negative judgment that can impact youths' perceptions of themselves. Our language can also impact our own thinking and decision-making.

In **Part I** of this guide, we hope to break down some of the barriers between young people who experience juvenile court and the adults who work in it. The guide can help system actors understand and respond to normal adolescent behaviors with compassion and empathy and develop strategies that validate a young person's anxiety and trauma. We suggest some self-reflection questions to consider.

In **Part II** we offer guidance on the language used in juvenile court and encourage system actors to adopt language that affirms the dignity and value of all youth.

An incarcerated young person noted that, "I'm a lot like that picture. I act all tough and mean, but I'm really just a scared fish." *Trish*

A Tool for Judicial Decision-Making

“How has the court’s past contact and involvement with this family influenced (or how might it influence) my decision-making process and findings?”





Old Habits Die Hard

“It is in our best interest to understand factors that shape our thinking—particularly those that can lead to unintentional, but real, disparate treatment in cases before juvenile and family courts.”

The
Lens
of

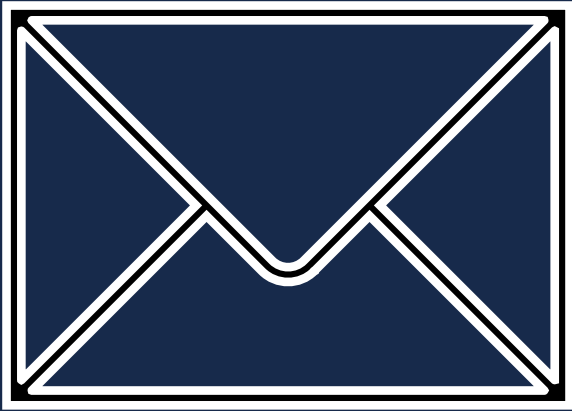
Implicit
Bias

By Shawn C. Marsh, Ph.D.

Red Green Blue Yellow Green Black Red Blue Yellow

- ❑ Received Funding to update its trauma audit instruments
- ❑ A National Conversation on Racial Equality and Child Welfare
- ❑ Launched BenchCard App
- ❑ Updated Values





Wenona.Belton@fultoncountyga.gov



www.fultonjuvenilecourt.org



(404) 613-4831

Thank you

A very special thank you to Joey Orduna Hastings, *CEO*, NCJFCJ