



## Administrative Office of the Courts

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### **Supreme Court forming Commission on Equity and Justice**

SANTA FE – The state Supreme Court today announced the establishment of a commission to study issues related to race and bias in the state’s justice system and promote diversity among judges and judicial employees.

In announcing plans for the Commission on Equity and Justice, the Supreme Court released an open letter to the public.

“Let our actions today reinforce our commitment to the words we hold sacred. The New Mexico Judiciary is firmly dedicated to the administration of equal justice under the law,” members of the Court wrote.

The work of the Judiciary depends on trust “that each New Mexican will be treated fairly under the laws of this state,” the Court stated.

“Without it, the justice system erodes and crumbles. But we cannot take your trust for granted. We must eliminate the deleterious effects of the poisons of prejudice, bias and racism. We must serve all persons equally, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, income, language, ability or education,” the Court’s letter continued.

“To achieve this goal, the Judiciary will engage in a critical examination of the institution. We need to acknowledge our shortcomings and recognize our conscious and unconscious biases. This reflection is the first step to lasting change. But actions speak louder,” the Court stated.

The detailed framework of the commission will be developed by a steering committee chaired by Justice C. Shannon Bacon.

The commission’s work will include “analysis of data, education for judges and court staff regarding implicit bias, the creation and improvement of court policies relating to diversity and inclusion, and a commitment to nominate more diverse individuals to serve on the bench,” the Court said.

Other members of the steering committee are Torri Jacobus, an attorney and head of the Office of Civil Rights for the city of Albuquerque; University of New Mexico Law School Professors Sonia Gipson Rankin and Vinay Harpalani, Taos Pueblo Tribal Court Judge David Eisenberg and state Court of Appeals Judge Briana Zamora.

“The Judiciary needs to join other government entities in examining how racism and bias affects our system and our work,” said Justice Bacon.

Courts in at least a dozen other states have similar committees or commissions working on equality and fairness in court operations and diversity in the judicial workforce.

Justice Bacon said the steering committee will make recommendations to the Supreme Court in the fall about the work, goals and structure of the commission, including its membership. After receiving the committee’s proposals, the Court will issue a formal order on the commission.

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