



**North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice
Committee on Public Trust and Confidence (Breakout Session)**

Meeting Minutes / September 30, 2015

MEETING DATE	September 30, 2015
TIME	10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
LOCATION	NCJC, 901 Corporate Center Drive, Raleigh NC, 27607

Attendees

Members: Sheriff Earl Butler, Douglas Clark, Frank Emory Jr., Juan Flores Jr., John Hood, Senator Floyd B. McKissick Jr., Dean Suzanne Reynolds, and Representative Sarah Stevens (Ex-Officio).

Reporters: Andrew Atkins and Mildred Spearman.

Administrative Matters

Andrew Atkins informed the group that committee chair Brad Wilson could not be present, but looks forward to working with the group. The members introduced themselves and shared information about their professional backgrounds.

Discussion

The group discussed items they would like to see the CPTC review. The observations of the committee are set forth in the table below.

Issue #1	The committee should take a broad view of the administration of justice when looking for ways to improve the courts.
Issue #2	The number of cases is increasing, with a different clientele than in the past. As a result, the jails are being used as prisons, with defendants in jail for sometimes two or three years pending trial.
Issue #3	One of the top issues that the committee should address is the selection of judges. While NC has had major changes to the selection process in the past few years, those changes involved very little open debate. Most members of the public have no idea of what the actual problems are related to judicial selection. Information gleaned from a discussion at the Courts Commission indicated that nobody knows much about candidates for the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court, but people want to be able to vote for their local judges. Another member indicated that retention elections likely will result in judges holding office indefinitely, when an aging judiciary is not necessarily a good thing. Even if you

	have independent bodies to select or recommend judges, you still have to find a way to ensure the independence of the people charged with making the recommendation or selection.
Issue #4	The public lacks knowledge about what goes on in the courthouses. The Judicial Branch needs to make more information available. People have come to rely on technology to find information, but you can get very little information about the courts online. You can lose your money, your freedom, or your life in the courthouse, but the courts still rely in large part on paper records, and consequently information is not easily accessible. The courts need to increase digital efficiency, because antiquated technology affects the public's perception of how well the courts can handle the needs of the public. Perhaps an ombudsman would help educate the public about how the system of justice actually works.
Issue #5	The media often reports on court cases in the same way in which they report on football games. There are winners and losers and play-by-play commentary, which does little to educate the public on the process.
Issue #6	The committee should look at the assignment of judges. Sometimes you get a different judge at different hearings, and some judges may not be familiar with the particular case. Many judges prefer business court because you don't have that kind of spin of the wheel with judges.
Item #7	Disparate charging and sentencing practices in criminal cases negatively affects public trust and confidence.
Item #8	The judicial districts are divided in unusual ways. You have large districts and small districts, with minority groups sometimes being a majority of a particular district without a corresponding representation of minorities in in the district's judicial staffing.
Item #9	The committee should discuss access to civil justice issues and how they affect public trust and confidence.
Item #10	Public financing of judicial campaigns is a big issue. We need to make sure that judges are not beholden to outside interests when they are making judicial decisions.
Item #11	The speed of the administration of justice is a problem regardless of the type of case or charge. We need to find ways to improve the flow of justice.

Other Matters

The reporters will provide the committee chair with the insight and observation of the members at today's meeting. In addition, the chair has asked the committee members to provide at least three topics for discussion and further exploration, which the reporters will compile in preparation for more in-depth discussion and consideration at the October 8, 2015 meeting.

Next Meeting

Date: Thursday, October 8, 2015

Time: 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Location: North Carolina Judicial Center, 901 Corporate Center Drive, Raleigh NC, 27607