



DANE COUNTY

Office of Equal Opportunity

Kathleen M. Falk
County Executive

Isadore Knox, Jr.
Director

**PRESS SUMMARY:
DANE COUNTY TASK FORCE ON RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SYSTEM**

Release Date: September 30, 2009

Wisconsin has become well-known as having one of the highest racial disparities in incarceration in the nation. However, few people realize that Dane County's racial disparities for arrest and incarceration are often ranked the highest in the entire nation. (See Task Force report, p. 4) Recent data show the chances that African Americans will be arrested in Dane County for certain drug offenses are 30 times greater than the chances Whites will be arrested for those offenses. In addition, African Americans are 20 times more likely to be arrested in Dane County for robbery than are Whites. (see p. 67)

The tragedy in the numbers can best be seen by the fact that nearly ONE HALF of young African-American men in Dane County are either in prison, on probation/parole, or on extended supervision. (2006 data by Task Force member Dr. Pamela Oliver) Simply put, these disparities are inconsistent with our image of Dane County as a progressive community.

The Dane County Equal Opportunities Commission appointed this Task Force in August 2008, in response to the Feb. 2008 report and recommendations from the state-level Governor's Commission on Reducing Racial Disparities in Wisconsin's Criminal Justice System. The EOC, Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, and County Board Chair Scott McDonnell charged the Task Force to look to the recommendations of the Governor's Commission, and to study how they may be implemented on the local level in Dane County's criminal justice system in order to quickly and effectively reduce the extraordinarily high racial disparities that have created a crisis situation for our Black and Latino communities.

The Task Force began its work in September 2008 and is composed of a diverse group of individuals from law enforcement, community-based organizations and advocacy groups, academia, attorneys, service agencies, and the courts. The task force divided itself into five sub-groups and studied the various stages and decision points of the criminal justice system, as well as the best practices that have successfully reduced racial disparities in other communities. It also



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held four lively and well-attended public hearings, received presentations from experts in the field, and collected current arrest and traffic stop data from all 24 Dane County law enforcement agencies.

The task force has prepared a comprehensive list of recommendations that outlines best practices and bold initiatives for county officials to consider as they prepare for the budget process. There are over 80 recommendations listed in the report. They touch upon all aspects

of the criminal justice system including law enforcement, prosecution, the courts, juries, the jail and corrections, community based organizations and advocates, DOC probation/parole, the community at large, and Dane County leadership. The report includes:

- an introduction that outlines the history of the task force and the urgency of the issue;
- a history of racial disparity in Dane County;
- a section on the public hearings that shares the voices from the community;
- a list of the recommendations with background information and citations; and
- an appendix which describes information in more detail and includes data tables.

We have identified below the Task Force's highest priority recommendations. **However, the first order of business and the very first recommendation is a call to action from the leadership in Dane County (including all of its municipalities) to come together to acknowledge that racial disparity in the criminal justice system exists and that there is a commitment among the leaders of our community to reducing it.**

The urgency with which the Task Force presents these recommendations to the Dane County community is exemplified by the fact that a very diverse array of 21 Task Force members with widely varying viewpoints and perspectives on the issues, has unanimously voted to approve this report and the hope it holds for alleviating what can only be described as a human and civil rights crisis that affects not only communities of color, but the quality of life for our entire community.

Some of our top priority recommendations include:

1. A Call to Action for our leaders to make a commitment and give high priority to reducing racial disparities in Dane County's criminal justice system, p. 10
2. Provide additional funding to diversion programs, p. 31
3. Increase funding to community based organizations to prevent entry or re-entry into the criminal justice system, p. 17



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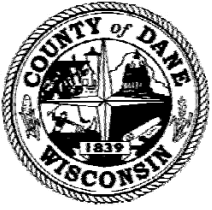
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4. Fund a driver's license recovery program, p. 47
5. Establish a restorative justice program, p. 36
6. Support the establishment of the AIM universal inmate screening program, p. 35
7. Vera Institute or Lafollette Institute study of prosecutorial discretion as it affects racial disparities in the DA's office, p. 34

8. Hire a criminal justice grant writer, p. 48
9. Establish a community support program (CSP) for returning offenders in need of mental health treatment, p. 41
10. Create a "Community of Opportunity" by investing in proactive neighborhood-based initiatives in low-opportunity neighborhoods, p. 11
11. Improve and standardize the citizen complaint process for all Dane County law enforcement agencies, p. 17
12. Hold regular meetings between deferred prosecution and diversion program managers and Criminal Justice Partners, to share program information and racial demographics of referrals, admissions and outcomes, p. 34
13. Conduct testing for employment discrimination based on race and ex-offender status among Dane County employers, p. 43
14. Sheriff's deputies should stop notifying immigration (ICE) about inmates booked into the jail for minor offenses, and bailiffs should stop notifying ICE and detaining immigrant residents who come to the courthouse, when they are found to have an immigration hold, as it is not required by law, pp. 23-24
15. Support efforts in the state Legislature to reduce driver's license suspensions for failure to pay child support, drug violations and unpaid traffic citations, p. 48
16. Increase representation of people of color working in the criminal justice system, including prosecutors, public defenders, court personnel, law enforcement, probation/parole agents and court personnel, p. 15
17. Establish a community education program to teach residents about their rights and about strategies to help those most affected by racial disparities take personal responsibility to keep themselves free of the criminal justice system, pp. 19 and 25
18. Law enforcement should issue enforceable warnings in lieu of arrests for low-level, high discretion offenses, p. 27
19. Develop Racial Impact Statements prior to implementing initiatives, policies or ordinances, p. 20



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20. Build routine data collection and assessment of racial/ethnic disparities into all Criminal Justice Partners' processes, and require the collection of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity data, pp. 12-13