

For Policy Development Purposes Only

Working Group Subject Matter Areas – Illustrative Issues to Address

Race and Training – Eradicating race-based bias, hatred and discrimination where it appears in our offices and work is a central goal across CPCS. To achieve meaningful change, we must innovate, coordinate and communicate to best leverage existing and prospective efforts to address systemic bias and abuse. A key aspect to our strategy is within training we will develop on Anti-Racism and Cultural Competency, related to our office environment and practice areas, which we will provide to CPCS staff and private bar advocates. This subcommittee will create the opportunity to engage interested staff to support these efforts and add insight to best focus and support our training needs and to work on proactive efforts to press for our organization to adopt and grown within a systemic anti-racism commitment that becomes inherent in our advocacy efforts.

Suggested Issues:

- **Building a Working Group resource** to support the Training Department's effort to institute anti-racism training and cultural competency into both internal and external educational needs for staff to and private counsel.
- **Create a stronger feedback loop** between people who have received training to improve accountability and add to future training
- **Creating a pool of volunteers to support race training** and other initiatives to support intra-office awareness on race
- **Support work to assess and improve the content of our practice training** on matters of race
- **Develop strategies and data sources to assess and monitor challenges and responses** on matters of race in our offices and in the field.
- **Outreach to external stakeholder groups** to share our concern and awareness of the need to address matters of racism and implicit bias in the judicial system.
- **Providing an annual update** on the progress CPCS is making on awareness and change on race and cultural awareness
- **Innovate to improve awareness, empathy and respect** toward our clients of color, from direct communications to our intra-office conversations.

Employee Support, Retention and Advancement –We need new strategies and means to enhance connection to CPCS among diverse and underrepresented employees across the agency. Whether for purposes of career satisfaction, advancement or building the strength and resiliency of our agency, we can come up with strategies to help employees feel more welcome, contribute more to our work and build careers within our agency. With budget challenges being a constant reality, is there an opportunity to help and encourage staff to grow, stay with our agency and explore new opportunities in their current roles or in other CPCS job functions? The answer has to be yes.

- **Assess current supports** provided to entering staff, across all roles, departments and divisions to identify ways to improve this assistance to build stronger connection to CPCS and its mission.
- **Develop new approaches** to assist diverse and underrepresented rising attorneys to better acclimate within CPCS, pass the Bar and be welcomed into the legal community.
- **Facilitate and support connections** within the Massachusetts public defender and broader professional organizations for colleagues of color and underrepresented others across our agency.
- **Identify, recommend and implement best practices** for employee retention and advancement among existing staff and supervisors across CPCS.
- **Research and make recommendations for leadership training** and new opportunities to support advancement and broader knowledge among CPCS staff and supervisors?
- **Identify strategies for mentorship and orientation** to the interrelationship between CPCS divisions in support of employee retention and advancement
- **Support the Supreme Judicial Court's Attorney Well-Being efforts**, and work to expand its reach to all CPCS colleagues who serve our clients, to respond to the challenges of stress in legal advocacy.

Recruitment – CPCS can and must build a workforce that best reflects the diversity of the clients we serve, which includes eliminating barriers to access based on bias risks and that experienced by candidates people of color and other marginalized people who could join our agency. We also have great potential to leverage our workforce to expand opportunities including mentorship, internships and awareness of the work across our roles and divisions. This subcommittee will make recommendations and help implement change.

- **Develop understanding and make recommendations to improve current recruitment strategies** toward diverse and underrepresented employment and internship candidates, including outreach to prospective candidates engaging division, regional and other resources.
- **Strategize to build advocacy candidate pipelines** by messaging and inspiring young students of color and marginalized students to consider public defender work and careers with CPCS, as lawyers or other professionals in our advocacy work.
- **Utilize CPCS employee demographic data to better identify recruitment needs**, improve our expertise with data resources and use this information to refine recruitment messaging and strategy.
- **Create new relationships and communication streams among** community organizations and stakeholders about CPCS and our objective to identify and employ diverse and underrepresented individuals.
- **Design outreach** strategies to help CPCS staff engage schools attended, their volunteer organizations, social media, and other contacts to support our recruitment of diverse and underrepresented individuals.

Access – In our offices, the courts and the administrative agencies where we practice, denials of access compound the denial of due process and justice our clients face. Obvious

considerations include language barriers and disability based access challenges, but bias and disrespect impacts all diverse and underrepresented people, by virtue of race, gender identity, LGBTQ status, age, national origin and other vulnerable categories. This subcommittee will recommend new strategies and tools to adopt and utilize within CPCS to eliminate barriers faced by clients, families and the public in support of achieving client-centric resolutions. We also identify and point out the barriers in the judicial and administrative systems we engage with to influence their honoring access obligations toward CPCS clients and our staff.

- **Identify barriers that Black clients and members of the public face** in accessing CPCS services.
- **Prioritize identified intra-agency barriers for change** to improve access for clients and members of the public with disabilities to equitably connect with CPCS and the services we provide, whether by phone, on-line or in our offices.
- **Conduct needed research and analysis to support a CPCS language access plan** to help individuals who are limited English proficient communicate effectively with our clients, by identifying the need and vital communications we must share with clients or members of the public.
- **Identify, prioritize and recommend advocacy on issues among stakeholder barriers to access** based on race or other protected categories, on policy and practice levels.
- **Develop recommendations to expand training on cultural awareness and respect** for diverse and underrepresented individuals across CPCS, including colleagues, clients and the public.

Events and Activities – There is great interest expressed across CPCS among staff, supervisors and our Committee to identify various internal approaches to improve respect for our clients and each other on questions of race, as well as consider other diverse and/or marginalized individuals. There are also opportunities for CPCS to reach out to internal and community groups to build knowledge, connectivity and greater empathy for what colleagues, clients and the public face from bias. Book groups, community events, outside speakers, training, honoring past clients, recognition of special cultural moments are only a few ideas we could generate, propose, and implement to achieve these objectives and have some fun in the process.

- **Obtain and assess ideas for events and activities** CPCS can undertake to build our collective knowledge and empathy, build community awareness about CPCS and expand community relationships
- **Work with the Racial Equity Trainer to structure activities** for CPCS staff to routinely engage in shared efforts to read, view films or otherwise connect to build racial and cultural awareness
- **Learn from other public defender systems** on efforts to develop racial awareness to bring to CPCS and/or to consider collaborating on shared activities.
- **Consider and recommend ways to expand recognition** of diversity and underrepresented group heritage months
- **Capture and report on CPCS events and activities across the Commonwealth** to build greater connection and encourage similar initiatives among stakeholders to build shared awareness with our agency

Community/Stakeholder Engagement – CPCS can be more visible, respected and supported through stronger and more diverse connections within the communities and local organizations where we work. With the ability to build good community relationships, CPCS can also engage community partners to support anti-bias and creative justice initiatives, including with respect to our stakeholders, such as restorative justice strategies. Ultimately, the lives CPCS touch through clients and community under our representation extends to the families, employers, houses of worship and other organizations that make up the communities we serve. These relationships can help to build community embrace of our role, while undoing the demonization of our clients and illustrating the bias that compounds the struggles our clients and their families face.

- **Assess the current network of CPCS community contacts**, and the kinds of support we realize from these relationships on behalf of the diverse and underrepresented individuals and groups we serve.
- **Identify a range of additional contacts**, across divisions and regions that could be of value for CPCS to develop in support of our agency and our clients.
- **Develop and recommend strategic ways to build relationships** within an expanded network of community members and organizations, in support of our EID objectives
- **Identify new strategies to leverage advocacy from among expanded community relationships** regarding our stakeholders, to encourage their support in advocating for greater understanding, racial and cultural awareness and empathy that will enhance fairness toward our clients.
- **Develop messaging that communicates the impact of the relationships we build** and our shared efforts for fairness to inspire a broader, statewide vision for community support and collaboration on behalf of CPCS and our clients.

Equity Policy – This subcommittee will consider opportunities to improve CPCS practices, rules and behaviors that may be perceived to or result in potentially biased impacts, regardless of intent. Similarly, there are policies and practices among our stakeholders that present bias challenges to our clients and our representation that to go unaddressed. One example is in the lack of transportation to courts, including Belchertown District and the Plymouth County Judicial Complex, among others, where the inequity of access undermines the ability to seek justice. Similar considerations exist in the consistency of the courts and administrative agencies fairly applying requirements for access, including on interpreter services or reasonable accommodation, as well as on religion accommodation, LGBTQ status, age and other factors. Through study and assessment of data, this subcommittee will develop, recommend and implement approved policy approaches to improve CPCS's profile for fairness and to challenge the equity failings of the justice and administrative systems that pass judgment on our clients.

- **Identify areas of potential bias risks within CPCS toward the public**, through office data and concerns, as well as through connection with clients,
- **Articulate the bias experienced within the justice system** by counsel and other CPCS staff in working with clients, witnesses and the public

- **Establish a list of bias risk based on priority of harm or need for change**, starting with practices that impact people based on race.
- **Make recommendations to CPCS leadership for action on the areas identified**, and implement agreed upon strategies, which could include opinion pieces, policy development, policy change advocacy, recommending legislative initiatives, litigation and other means of engagement.
- **Build relationships with potential allies**, including education/research institutes, community organizations and others with whom we can amplify issues of concern for more studied advocacy.