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Executive Summary

The MCJC virtual community dialogue took place on Wednesday, June 23, 2021. The topic of the community dialogue focused on sentencing in the criminal justice system following a presentation by Justice Geske and Judge Clevert. Participants were asked a round of three questions by Zeidler Center trained facilitators:

1. *“Share your reflections about sentencing in the criminal justice system.”*
2. *“What if anything from Justice Geske and Judge Clevert’s presentation resonate with you and are there questions that remain for you?”*
3. *“How do you believe the CJC should engage community members in future discussions about justice system improvements and initiatives?”*

If time permitted, participants were asked to participate in Connected Conversation: *“What do you see as short and long-term goals (top priorities) of the local justice system to increase legitimacy and repair harm in our community?”*.

During the first round, participants were asked to reflect on sentencing in the criminal justice system. Major themes throughout round one, and the entire event, were unfairness and racial bias in the criminal justice system. Overall, participants shared the opinion that the criminal justice system was unfair and racially biased, with some participants highlighting their own experiences with injustices in the system. Other participants reflected on the impact of their professional choices in perpetuating what they felt was an unfair system. These participants shared with the group the complexity and subjectivity of sentencing. The idea of sentencing as complex and subjective was reiterated in later rounds.

During the second round, participants expressed surprise at the complexity and subjectivity of sentencing. Other participants identified what they believed was wrong with the criminal justice system and what could be done to fix it. Some participants shared the opinion that the system was flawed but questioned how it could be fixed, rather than offering their own ideas. This placed the onus on authority figures, an idea other participants shared in two themes around political change and educating children.

During the third round, many participants wanted to see CJC reach families and individuals impacted by the criminal justice system or expand the scope of its events to reach different communities. Others wanted to see more discussions or conversations by the CJC; a third group shared this view and believed the June 23, 2021, event was a good starting point. A final group sought to raise awareness about both CJC’s mission and the criminal justice system.

During the Connected Conversation, participants were asked to share short-term and long-term goals to repair harm from or legitimize the criminal justice system. Many of the participants suggested working to be more transparent and build trust. Participants believed transparency and trust were key to changing the criminal justice system. Other participants discussed juvenile sentencing and felt it was too harsh.

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Listening Circle Analysis

Question Round One: Share your reflections about sentencing in the criminal justice system.

“My brother, a Black disabled vet, was charged with a blue-collar crime and was sentenced to 18 years. Not everyone can afford good lawyers. Public Defenders will get paid whether they win or lose. Lots of us can’t afford lawyers. I took my students to visit the court system. We witnessed a White boy who was convicted of sexually molesting a 2-year-old receive a sentence of 200 hours of community service, while a Black man received 20 years for possession of crack cocaine.”

1.1 Racially Biased, Unequal, or Unfair

When prompted to reflect on sentencing in the criminal justice system, participants shared varying opinions on the fairness of the system. Many felt the criminal justice system and sentencing were unfair, biased, or unequal.

Participants agreed that the criminal justice system and sentencing were biased against minorities but had different perspectives. Some participants shared direct experiences with bias while going through the criminal justice system, commenting that they were treated unfairly or believed the judge was biased. Other participants reflected on how certain systemic patterns have continued through different generations.

To highlight inequalities in the criminal justice system, participants shared personal stories. Some participants disclosed stories of family members receiving excessive or unfair sentencing, compared to white people who committed similar or more severe crimes.

Another aspect of sentencing participants found unfair was the level of discretion a judge has in sentencing, leading participants to believe judges were bringing their own biases into sentencing. Participants felt minorities were punished excessively for small crimes or first-time offenses. Revocations were often cited as an example of how minorities were punished unfairly, despite resulting generally from victimless crimes.

1.2 Professional Impact

Several participants who were judges or worked in the criminal justice system reflected on the impact of their professional choices on individuals. Many participants who spoke about the criminal justice system and sentencing from this perspective felt sentencing was unfair or biased. Judges felt the subjectivity of sentencing made it more difficult. The judges who spoke about their struggles with sentencing shed some light on why it can often be difficult to sentence.

Judges believed one of the most difficult aspects of sentencing is recognizing their own implicit bias. One judge noted that prosecutors hold “great discretion” and urged other judges to listen to defense attorneys and victims. Other judges concurred with the opinion that the criminal justice system was biased and called for changes to how sentencing is done. While judges were primarily the participants contemplating their professional impact, one participant made the following statement:

“I think a lot about how my agency intersects with sentencing. I am wondering if our [probation] reports have an impact on disparate sentencing. I reflect on what I contributed inadvertently and how we can move ahead in a more equitable way.”

A common thread was apparent within this theme. Participants wondered how their professional choices have upheld the system, the difficulty of sentencing, and suggestions on how to improve the system.

1.3 Sentencing Data

Two participants discussed how data from the criminal justice system could help change or improve the system. One participant shared their role tracking data from court systems:

“I worked mainly with data from the court systems to compare mandatory minimum sentencing but realized that there was a discretion (sic) of the data and that there was a problem with how data was being tracked to identify adverse impact on a person/conviction and I would like to know the status over the years.”

The other participant, a criminology researcher, expressed a desire to see more action in improving the criminal justice system. This participant commented, *“I see it from data, but I know that we need the connection to create change.”*

Question Round Two: *What if anything from Justice Geske and Judge Clevert’s presentation resonated with you and are there questions that remain for you?*

“What resonated with me has me thinking that the first person who has input into the case adds their implicit bias, and then the bias of the next person, and then the bias of the next person ... by the time it gets to the judge there are lots of things that have influenced it. This may lead to getting the decision to a wrong place. It is hard in the system to get a fair decision. It’s not just the judge; it’s the whole system. It’s really sad every day. I feel bad about living here. Can we do something better?”

2.1 Bias and the Complexity of Sentencing

Participants revisited a similar theme in question round two: bias and the complexity of sentencing. Upon hearing Justice Geske and Judge Clevert’s presentation, many participants were surprised at the complexity of sentencing. Participants seemed unaware of the subjectivity of sentencing and believed sentencing was biased, subjective or unfair. One participant highlighted the amount of bias a case might see, commenting:

“What resonated with me has me thinking that the first person who has input into the case adds their implicit bias, and then the bias of the next person, and then the bias of the next person ... by the time it gets to the judge there are lots of things that have influenced it. This may lead to getting the decision to a wrong place. It is hard in the system to get a fair decision. It’s not just the judge; it’s the whole system. It’s really sad every day. I feel bad about living here. Can we do something better?”

Other participants echoed similar opinions, noting the influence judges have in sentencing and the number of factors judges need to consider when sentencing. Participants in this theme expressed concern that the complexity of sentencing can affect the outcome of a case.

2.2 The System Needs...

Similar to earlier themes, participants were surprised and concerned with the discretion judges have in sentencing. This led participants to believe that the criminal justice system and sentencing were unfair. Rather than scrutinize judges, participants believed this was a systemic problem. Several participants made suggestions on what the system needs to improve. Suggestions varied but many believed the criminal justice system needed large, sweeping changes across the entire system.

2.3 What Can Be Done to Change...

Unlike participants in the last theme, participants in this theme questioned what could be done to improve the criminal justice system. Participants, as in other themes in this round, also believed the criminal justice system was unfair and wanted to know what actionable steps could be taken to improve it, but did not offer any suggestions of their own. For example, one participant commented about Justice Geske's presentation:

“What is uppermost to me came from Justice Geske regarding the lack of racial equity and how systemic racism permeates the entire criminal justice system. My question is ‘What are some tangible things to do to dismantle that situation?’”

Rather than offer suggestions for improvement, participants in this theme questioned what could be done to change the situation. While not explicitly stated, participants wanted to know what authority figures could do to change the criminal justice system. In contrast to participants in the previous theme who actively posited that the community was responsible for change, participants in this theme wanted to know what community leaders could do to affect change.

2.4 Political Change

Several participants called for political change. Participants within this theme saw political change as the only viable way to change the criminal justice system. These participants held a top-down mindset, believing change starts at the top with political leaders.

Participants saw policy and legislative changes to the criminal justice system as the key to a more equal, fair criminal justice system. This was not an uncommon opinion among participants. In an earlier round, one participant suggested bringing back legislation which made sentencing indeterminate.

Other participants emphasized the importance of voting, specifically in local elections. Some participants recognized the role of state and local politics. One participant said of voting in local elections:

“I have worked in the past recent elections to increase voter turnout and became so frustrated with individuals that are only voting during the Presidential election cycle. I was often told that they don't know who the judges are so they would not cast a ballot. I have tried to explain to individuals within the community that all elections count, and we must figure out how to educate the community on the importance of local elections. These

elections have consequences and if we don't participate in the process there will not be change to the court systems until we improve local election voting."

Another participant shared a similar opinion. These participants recognized the importance of holding elected officials accountable but also felt it was important to participate in local and state elections.

2.5 Educate Children

Participants also felt it was important to educate children, the next generation of voters, on criminal justice issues. This echoes the opinion of participants in the previous theme of participating in local and state election. Participants also believed educating the future generation of voters could potentially lead to systemic change.

Question Round Three: *How do you believe the CJC should engage community members in future discussions about justice system improvements and initiatives?*

"As we talk about community policing there are many people giving input there. We need more community conversations with families after sentencing. I'm not even near sentencing yet, so I don't know. But solutions should come from the families and people affected who have experienced it. It's most valuable to get input from the people who experienced it and did not feel justice and to know why."

3.1 Reach Specific and Relevant People

During round three, many participants suggested reaching out to specific and relevant audiences for future discussions about justice system improvements and initiatives. Participants fell into two camps in this theme. Some participants suggested reaching out to families and individuals directly impacted by injustices in the criminal justice system, while other participants recommended reaching out to different communities.

Participants suggested having discussions with individuals and families who have been impacted by the criminal justice system. This group of participants felt it was important to get input from individuals with direct or indirect lived experiences.

Other participants wanted CJC to expand its reach and engage with different communities. Participants suggested having meetings in different locations, or virtual meetings to reach more people from different communities.

3.2 Forums and Discussions

Several participants wanted to see more forums and discussions. These participants felt events like the one they attended were important. Participants wanted to see those conversations continue. Like participants in the last theme, some participants felt it was critical to have conversations with different communities.

3.3 Good Start

A few participants said the event they attended was a good start. Participants in this theme echoed similar ideas as participants in other themes. For example, one participant suggested CJC use virtual meetings to

reach communities outside of their immediate area. Another participant saw conversations as a starting point for future action.

3.4 Get the Word Out

Several participants wanted to spread the word about these events. Similar to an earlier theme, participants wanted to reach different people with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Other people within this theme broached the topic of education. Participants, also echoing a theme in round two, felt it was important to educate the larger community on current issues on race and the criminal justice system.

Connected Conversation

“What do you see as short and long-term goals (top priorities) of the local justice system to increase legitimacy and repair harm in our community?”

4.1 Trust and Transparency

Participants felt it was necessary to build more trust and transparency in the local criminal justice system. One participant believed that the reason the criminal justice system currently operates as it does is due to lack of transparency. Participants agreed with the idea that more transparency could help build the trust necessary for meaningful change.

4.2 Juvenile Sentencing

Two participants wished to see changes to juvenile sentencing. Both participants believed juvenile sentencing was unfair and harsh. One participant felt juveniles were not always sentenced fairly and said, *“Most people carry out these crimes without understanding what’s going to happen”*. This participant believed harsh juvenile sentencing doesn’t deter crime but alienates youth who don’t understand the consequences of their actions.

Participant Answers

Question Round One: *Share your reflections about sentencing in the criminal justice system.*

1.1 Racially biased, unequal, or unfair

- While there are clear guidelines, I understand there is a lot of subjectivity in the process. When we look at the records it's apparent that there are three systems: One for white people, another for people of color and a third for the police. In addition to leveling out of sentencing for similar crimes, police officers should be held to a standard.
- I don't think that there are processes that are any different here than in the rest of the country. There are racist differences in sentencing and policy based on our history of racial privilege rooted and created in racism. This is not saying it is rooted in hate and violence. We must have a shared understanding of the disparities.
- I agree with what (previous participant) said. I experienced it in my personal situation with being in the courtroom for this trial. It was very biased. I felt unheard and I felt violated. Because I survived the accident, I felt my story was pushed under the rug.
- Our court system/criminal justice system is unfair. What happened with Mr. Stinson was not appropriate to the judgment made. We also have a difference in decision-making in our courts depending on where you live—Milwaukee vs. Waukesha for example. We should have a uniform public defense system. Right now, it is unfair.
- I work at a Milwaukee organization. We have been part of the BLM movement through our organization. About sentencing --I have seen a lot of people – see their sentences – they are people with ethnic background, not Caucasian. They [the sentences] can't all happen that way. I also live in Tosa and am part of what is all happening there. Racial bias is a big issue – just this afternoon housing and bias were big on my mind, and I talked about it. It all melts together.
- When I reflect on sentencing --I have many conversations as of late, but it's part of a broader conversation regarding inequities through the criminal justice system at every point. The judge spoke about it earlier. The sentencing piece. Most folks with an active brain stem can analyze the data and see inequities in the system. Most will agree with that. The hard part is how they own their complicity in it. System and system inequities --there are real live human beings who run the system. The disparities exist – people who acknowledge it are complicit in perpetuating the disparities. They need to come to grips with it.
- In my opinion there is no equality or equity within our court systems...just look at the crack epidemic and how people of color were treated during this era. Unfortunately, much has not changed since I was a young community activist; 40 years later we are experiencing the same issues and victims are facing the same charges and we are holding the same conversations. The problem for me is that we seem to not be able to implement solutions to address everything and it is quite discouraging.
- I have lived in Milwaukee for over 30 years and have been a part of the MICAH Crime Task Force and the sentencing has been the same over the years which has been an eye-opening experience for me and frustrating as a white woman. I have been riding with black people to and from community events and have been pulled over (instead of Driving while Black; victim of Driving with Black Passengers) and have been told that today was my "lucky day" and let go with a warning but I know that people of color would not have the same experience."
- I agree with others which makes me think about all of the old cases that were unjust sentencing and highlighted in the documentary, "Their Eyes are on the Prize." I just turned 51 years old, and I feel

like I'm experiencing what my grandparents did in Detroit during the riots and with the organizing of the Black Panthers movement. I am so proud of my 27-year-old daughter for being able to express herself tonight and to share her father's personal story. In college, I studied history and received my degree, but I am still heartbroken feeling like this is a movie so distant, but I am living in this inequity as "just us" but when will it be equality and a happy dialogue for "all of us." Where is the action?"

- I have seen many disparities in sentencing. There is much work still to do.
- Sentencing is in fact really complicated. What happens is the legislature will pass laws that might have a wide range of sentencing.
- We can use the term disparity. In my community I don't think we'll ever get a fair shot. If we sneeze, we get 50 years. I think more information needs to be disbursed to the community. I don't think the powers that be understand. In my 51 years I don't think I've ever had a fair shot.
- It is tricky to be fair across the board. My son was murdered by someone out on parole. I'm angry at the system! At the same time, I know there's a lot of disparity in sentencing. People are in jail for things they don't need to be in there for, while others need harsher sentences. Many of the homicides are from repeat offenders- we really need to do something about that.
- I am a friend of the family. This is the closest I have been to the justice system. With my closeness, I wasn't happy with the decision. I see things on TV, but when it is in your face, it's more difficult to deal with. As a person of color, it feels like we always get the shorter end of the stick and don't always get justice. I understand what was said tonight about community impact having influence. I get that, but I also think a person is a person.
- I essentially believe it is flawed and dysfunctional. When I hear about judges having great discretion and knowing how biased people can be, it is not working right. That's why I am a proponent of restorative justice. This is usually applied in lower offenses. I encourage everyone to read a book published called *Repair the Circle* to better understand restorative justice which doesn't rely on punishment but instead focuses on moving forward.
- The justice system is flawed. I appreciated hearing from the judges, particularly Judge Clevert. Our system is broken and does not favor people of color. Sentences are more severe for people of color.
- I often see that the judge says they will go with the recommendation of the prosecutor, and they're often against us. We have little fight or pushback against that. There lies the problem. We have to start fighting on the lower level...the whole process is gross.
- I've seen the system from various aspects of my career and now when I mediate disputes worldwide. Very often there is a perception that people of color don't get justice and instead it is "just us" that deal with consequences. Many people still see people of color as a threat. People of color have to make sure that at every point that we can that we interact with other parts of society. We need to vote, show up at candidate forums and events. We need to hold DAs accountable.
- For me, I concur with what (the first participant) spoke about the system. I also have the feeling of not being heard. I wrote a letter to Judge Havas to express my disappointment. The sentence given to Streicher was less than Michael Vick got for abusing dogs. It was a slap in the face after the officer said he wanted to suppress his prior record. It showed there is a bias in sentencing, and I have seen that throughout my 64 years in Milwaukee. I recall a case in which the judge told the defendant to look out the window and count the number of pigeons on the roof and that would be the number of years of his sentence. I've been in a situation where a person was delivering a controlled substance to another person illegally. The person delivering the substance was not charged and she was a white nurse.

- I've seen so many disparities in sentencing, from overly lenient to grossly unfair. In one case I'm aware that they revoked supervision for having a firearm, but there was never any evidence that this firearm existed. He had 3 years added to the 3 he was serving to equal incarceration for 6 years, with no evidence produced.
- People are on probation or parole and are revoked on minor issues, then sentenced to finish their whole sentence in prison. I have seen situations where the difference in sentencing between Black and White people, for marijuana possession has been extreme.
- Revocations on rule violations are rampant and totally unjust. These are crimeless revocations. There clearly needs to be a transition. I know of a young Black mother who was sentenced to five years in prison for passing a message to an inmate. She was not aware that the message came from a drug dealer.
- My brother, a Black disabled vet, was charged with a blue-collar crime and was sentenced to 18 years. Not everyone can afford good lawyers. Public Defenders will get paid whether they win or lose. Lots of us can't afford lawyers. I took my students to visit the court system. We witnessed a White boy who was convicted of sexually molesting a 2-year-old receive a sentence of 200 hours of community service, while a Black man received 20 years for possession of crack cocaine.
- A better job needs to be done. A lot of people don't understand everything that goes into sentencing. All they see is what happened and what the sentence was. So, there can be anger among the community. Some people get lighter sentences, but all people see is A-B-C. You look up and someone else (with a similar charge) else gets a much lesser sentence. There needs to be a lot more education on how this process works.
- I definitely echo the discussion on disparities. I also will come from a personal perspective. My uncle spent several years in prison. Nobody died, no one was harmed. He went in at age 60 and he had heart problems. When he was released, he came out in a wheelchair, and they didn't have a place to put him because he was so ill and assisted living wouldn't take him. So, he had to stay in prison. Then I had a friend who was biking and was hit, left for dead, and the driver left the scene and kept on drinking. My friend died and the other person was left severely injured. The driver got (a light sentence.) My uncle was a veteran, he didn't have a previous record. The system makes no sense to me.
- I've seen the system from various aspects of my career and now when I mediate disputes worldwide. Very often there is a perception that people of color don't get justice and instead it is "just us" that deal with consequences. Many people still see people of color as a threat. People of color have to make sure that at every point that we can that we interact with other parts of society. We need to vote, show up at candidate forums and events. We need to hold DAs accountable.
- Sentencing is just not fair. I think there should be the same criteria for everyone. We need sentencing criteria that establishes equity - regardless of someone's title, position, race, etc. I know that implicit bias is involved and that was spoken about in the introduction. We have to get past this. We need to get to a point of being able to hear the facts in a case and move away from the implicit bias that distorts those facts.
- I have similar thoughts to the themes that I've been hearing for this question. I find it very hard to think of any kind of sentencing as fair. There is just so much discretion in sentencing. There's so much variation in how things are enacted as opposed to how laws are written. There is no way for justice to be served like this. Justice isn't blind and it never has been in the United States. It's hard to separate out the current criminal justice systems from history. Our country's negative history of bias and genocide and racial inequality. Restorative justice is essential but very hard to imagine at this point.

1.2 Professional Impact

- I think a lot about how my agency intersects with sentencing. I am wondering if our [probation] reports have an impact on disparate sentencing. I reflect on what I contributed inadvertently and how we can move ahead in a more equitable way.
- As a judge the hardest thing for me to do is sentencing. Trying to figure out what sentencing means is very difficult. If you hear someone say that a judge says that they don't second-guess themselves don't believe it; they do [second guess themselves]. I appreciate [participant-relative of Caesar] and [participant-close friend of Caesar] being here. Together we need to figure out what that right point is. As someone in the system you need to let everyone know that you have implicit bias. I get push back when I say that. What I'm saying is that I have implicit bias as well. You can adjust for it -- research supports this --and pass onto others. We need to spend more time examining what we are thinking and identifying our biases.
- There needs to be change in legislation regarding charges leading to revocation. We have come a long way re: marijuana sentencing. It now takes 25grams and a gun to be charged as a controlled substance. We need to be aware that prosecutors hold great discretion. Our obligation is to listen to the defense attorneys and the victims. As judges, we are not all consistent.
- In 1999 Truth in Sentencing replaced indeterminate sentencing. We need to return to indeterminate sentencing. With indeterminate sentencing, in a case where a judge was wrong, once inside the person could demonstrate other behavior and be allowed to serve part of their sentence in the community. We are not policing our judges who are sentencing excessively. This needs correction.
- As a judge, I hate the sentencing process and that is why I would always ask to be placed back at the child court system because there were more unique things that I could do in order to help an individual get back on track. Because of this issue, I dedicated my life to problem solving, court restorative justice, educating others about implicit biases and the impact of trauma. I see people as humans when sentencing and that means that sometimes you will see progress in individuals; other times you won't, but you have to look hard to ensure that you are not using implicit bias and identify other ways to try not to send people to prison but to community-based programs because we know that they are more efficient and work. However, there are limited resources which is very frustrating, and we know that we need more resources for mental health, domestic violence, drug counseling... So, I would hate sentencing individuals knowing that the system is unfair. I would try to dictate charges to be more fair, restorative reform-based and less defensive and we need to change our court systems to be this way.
- I appreciated the explanation of the process and the admission that implicit bias is a factor. I would be interested in the specific guidelines for sentencing for this specific charge.
- Just speaking about sentencing: I was appointed as judge just last year. Judges have ENORMOUS latitude in sentencing. My thoughts are that there is a balance of the gravity of the offence, balanced with the character of the person and also with the needs of the community, the rights of the victim and individual harm done. It's an incredible responsibility. However, anyone who says there is no bias in the system has not worked in the system. There is a tension that is constantly on my mind.
- Acknowledge the loss of Caesar. I am coming from a place of privilege. I wonder about the role of changing laws and ordinances in addition to sentencing. Start to look more up stream. Might there be a pitfall by focusing too much on sentencing? In the big picture I want to be an agent of change in the upstream. As a provider I see a lot of bias in who is retained, bias in the sheriffs' office treatment of people. I see that how victims are treated changes the perception of the providers.
- This question is very hard for me. I'm a retired police officer - I worked as a police officer for over 25 years. I always knew there were inequities in the criminal justice system, especially for minorities.

But I didn't think about it much because of my job. It was in the background, but it wasn't at the top of my mind. Since I retired, I have had to seriously reflect on this. Caesar's case has made me reevaluate my entire career and really look at the contributions I may have made to those inequities. I know I can't control the outcome of cases as a police officer, but this whole issue hit home really hard for me with Caesar. (speaker is very emotional at this point)

- Caesar's case hit very close to home for me as a social worker. I've worked for years with lots of adults who participate in the criminal justice system or receive services from the criminal justice system. I've seen lots of disparities, these hit close to home, and I've needed to reflect a lot since Caesar's death. I advocate and work hard daily to help people deal with difficulties in the system. Disparities are very real, and this is a very emotional topic. In Milwaukee disparities exist in sentencing. There is blatant disrespect and disregard for people of color.

1.3 Sentencing Data

- I was thinking when MCJC was initially formed we held staff meetings and conducted policy forum discussions with the Sheriff's Office regarding the Huber treatment centers and how they are being monitored and programs attended/implemented, etc. I worked mainly with data from the court systems to compare mandatory minimum sentencing but realized that there was a discretion (sic) of the data and that there was a problem with how data was being tracked to identify adverse impact on a person/conviction and I would like to know the status over the years.
- I am a researcher of criminology and have mixed perspectives with the system. These conversations are critical. It is critical to take a closer look at the system and how it impacts families. We need the ears of different aspects of the system to be listening. We need to have more dialogue. I see it from data, but I know that we need the connection to create change.

Question Round Two: *What effect can a strong leader have? In other words, why are leaders important?*

2.1 Bias and the complexity of sentencing

- I was impressed to hear from the judges their acknowledgement that the court system is contending with bias and racism and it's an ongoing struggle at various levels.
- The sentencing process is misunderstood. We seldom hear from family members in the misdemeanor court system. It would be important for that to occur here as well for proper sentencing.
- What resonated with me has me thinking that the first person who has input into the case adds their implicit bias, and then the bias of the next person, and then the bias of the next person ... by the time it gets to the judge there are lots of things that have influenced it. This may lead to getting the decision to a wrong place. It is hard in the system to get a fair decision. It's not just the judge; it's the whole system. It's really sad every day. I feel bad about living here. Can we do something better?
- The degree of discretion that judges have and the complexity of the factors they have to consider. I walked away with that – I'm ignorant about sentencing- this is new knowledge. This left me feeling even more frustrated about inequities of sentencing. When the judges talked about how the character of the people being sentenced was a factor –this was even more far off the mark than I realized.
- It was very difficult for me to hear the judges' presentation [the volume was very low] but I do agree that layers of biases that exist today end up complicating the outcome of the situation. There should be more equity. Hearing [another participant's] surprise about the judge's discretion – and how this

can create inequities. Just having seen that discretion and how sentencing for 2 people ends up differently.

- Both of them made it very clear that an honest judge with all the facts has a very tough job. Every judge brings their own history to the bench and that is a big factor in the decision-making.

2.2 The system needs...

- What resonated with me was the need for diversity throughout the system. And by diversity, I mean every kind: including gender, age, LGBTQ, race, and the different thought processes people have. I want to say in regard to authority, it is the responsibility of the judge to make sure it is fair.
- Inequality within the system is swept under the rug. We need reform. We need solutions.
- I know Judges Clevert and Geske. I defer to their descriptions of the current system and its challenges. We have to take these issues seriously. We need to integrate community members' reactions and input.
- We have to be catalysts for change and restorative justice. My father had to be killed to become a catalyst for change.
- When they broke down all of the different elements of the sentencing decision it made me think about the fact that our agency has rules and regulations too that we have to follow. I am wondering now if this is the best way to approach this. What are we missing? We need to look at those criteria [the rules and regulations]. We should look at how do we get that into the mix of our work and how our work can help to get more fair outcomes.
- Most of the things are engrained in me. It's not just the judge... it's a systemic problem all through the system. We need more focus and more balance throughout. Focus on that.
- I said my piece about all of the people in the system ---this needs to be examined at every level in my opinion. The issue for community members is not that we saw someone get a slap on the wrist, it's that people like us, who look like this, don't just get a slap on the wrist.
- We need to be intentional fighting the system set up against us, even unconsciously. I don't have faith in the system, but I do have faith in what we can do together. I think about justice for the families affected; when will they see real justice?

2.3 What can be done to change...

- What is uppermost to me came from Justice Geske regarding the lack of racial equity and how systemic racism permeates the entire criminal justice system. My question is "What are some tangible things to do to dismantle that situation?"
- My imprisoned brother filed a complaint and was put in the hole for 6 months. I have heard stories of guards impregnating inmates with terrible aftermath. What can be done to affect prison actions, and the situation of the prisoners? What are avenues toward protection of inmates?
- I appreciate the judges breaking down the process outcomes that were mentioned for the court system and how the actual behavior for one-person crime versus others can result in a sentencing difference. This helped explain how sentencing at times is not based on what an individual actually did but how other external factors can play a part in the process. However, how do we document such sentencing practices in order to act proactively without waiting until something happens to a victim directly?
- I felt that the discussion was very intriguing by both judges explaining the sentencing process and how they typically arrive at a position. However, they explained that during the sentencing process they would evaluate an individual's prior criminal history, but Cesar nor the officer involved in the

incident was not that type of victim or defendant, so what is the process when you have to sentence in a similar case? Is there any information that can be provided or implemented to address this issue? We need a policy procedure and standardization regarding cases like this one...do we have anything to inform judges on how to proceed regarding this matter?

- I don't have much to share on this question. The speakers discussed implicit bias, but I mostly want to see how to make this change. How do we change the system to ultimately do the right thing?
- There wasn't much that the speaker shared that I felt like I didn't already know. I'm more interested in resolution and change. I appreciated their input, and yes it could be useful for folks needing more knowledge on the general topic. But mostly I'm looking for resolution and speakers about resolution.
- Really there was nothing that resonated positively for me in the introduction. It was nice to have legal experts weigh in tangentially, but as far as breaking down discretion and human bias I don't think the comments added much new information. As I was listening it made me wonder for those directly affected by the loss of Mr. Stinson what this was really doing for them. And as far as building transparency, I don't feel that the talks were able to do that either since no one could share any details of the case. Perhaps it was good enough for the intro or maybe for people needing more information. But I'm especially looking forward to the next meeting into what comes out of all of this.

2.4 Political change

- As a community we need to talk to legislators about changes in the laws regarding how things are done. A police officer will physically accost you, check your pockets, etc., while an IRS agent calls you to give you a warning. These different styles of practice need to be considered. Policing and the criminal justice system need to become more "user friendly" to bring about better relations between them and the community.
- I have worked in the past recent elections to increase voter turnout and became so frustrated with individuals that are only voting during the Presidential election cycle. I was often told that they don't know who the judges are so they would not cast a ballot. I have tried to explain to individuals within the community that all elections count, and we must figure out how to educate the community on the importance of local elections. These elections have consequences and if we don't participate in the process there will not be change to the court systems until we improve local election voting.
- Governor Evers has committed his leadership to diversifying the local benches; however, his efforts are stuck in the legislature and court system. The issue of diversity is being trapped in over and over causing more harm since we are unable to create policies to reform and mentor existing and incoming judges on such things as implicit bias and trauma training. We need to support new judges to change how they are viewing cases and sentencing. There is an opportunity to do things differently as it relates to identifying leadership for our local benches that is more radical, equitable and inclusive for women, LGBT communities and POC. These new judges will need support, mentorship, and training in order to "get the right people" into office to help support in a variety of ways.
- I agree that we need to hold elected officials accountable. I need to be more informed when voting. Do I really know what candidates' intentions are or what stance they take or where they stand on big issues? I need to do more homework and make better informed decisions to take the extra step and go the extra mile. Right now, our hands are tied and electing the right people may be the best thing we can do. As a parent we need to start raising our children to hold these positions in the future. We need to have these conversations with our children so they can continue to make decisions in our favor.

2.5 Educate children

- I agree that we need to hold elected officials accountable. I need to be more informed when voting. Do I really know what candidates' intentions are or what stance they take or where they stand on big issues? I need to do more homework and make better informed decisions to take the extra step and go the extra mile. Right now, our hands are tied and electing the right people may be the best thing we can do. As a parent we need to start raising our children to hold these positions in the future. We need to have these conversations with our children so they can continue to make decisions in our favor.
- The importance of passing information on to children is critical and is resonating with me. Both raising kids that see the importance and the value of change and the desire to make that meaningful change. How do we impact a lot of the challenges that we see in outcomes? How do we impact it enough to make system level change and meaningful differences in outcomes? How do we do this so people both perceive and are receiving justice? What does justice mean and look like for communities that don't feel like they are receiving justice now?
- Teaching our kids- our kids need to know what makes the system work and how the system fails from time to time. It goes back to civics- what do judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, etc., do? How do they contribute to the system? This comes back to schools and education. Kids need to know how the government works and they need to know that there is a lot of disinformation out there. We need to teach children and each other to read as widely as possible and go beyond soundbites and short videos, especially during elections. We need to get as much information as possible. The informed citizen is the cornerstone of democracy. We need to know who is going to serve as judges, prosecutors, police officers, parole officers, etc. We need to serve as jurors when we are called.

Question Round Three: *What effect can a strong leader have? In other words, why are leaders important*

3.1 Reach specific and relevant people

- I think that the way to reform is the way this Council is used in marijuana cases. You need to ask the people who were harmed.
- I think we need to make sure we have a lot of people involved. I looked at the diversity of this group tonight and it was very good.
- The justice system should definitely connect more with family members and community leaders. They need to take action now. This situation with Mr. Stinson should not have occurred for this to be considered.
- The justice system members should speak more frequently with family members regarding individuals in their respective family who have been impacted by the system. I have two brothers in prison. I know things from what I hear from them. Your system members need to be more aware of what is going on.
- I can't go to regular CJC meetings due to my court schedule but if you hold these types of meetings at alternative times like this evening, individuals like me can participate. I encourage consideration of meeting in different locations if not virtual and also live-stream these meetings so more people can participate in the discussions.
- Invite to the table agencies victims and let them have a voice.
- Add more individuals with lived experience.

- As we talk about community policing there are many people giving input there. We need more community conversations with families after sentencing. I'm not even near sentencing yet, so I don't know. But solutions should come from the families and people affected who have experienced it. It's most valuable to get input from the people who experienced it and did not feel justice and to know why.
- Having additional conversations like this and being intentional about widening the word and getting more people involved. We should have diverse voices from different perspectives at the conversation. When we have community meetings, we frequently have the same people, which is good, but we also need to welcome new people and have them feel comfortable and really welcome.

3.2 Forums and Discussions

- First, I am grateful this is happening, and I think it would be important to survey and collect topics for discussion from the community. And this should happen on a very consistent basis.
- This Forum—attending the CJC meetings regarding the situations in the jail and the House of Correction and their healthcare issues has been an important forum for discussion preceding changes—and it should continue.
- Forums like this—getting together with family members is so important. Do more forums and events like this!
- Having additional conversations like this and being intentional about widening the word and getting more people involved. We should have diverse voices from different perspectives at the conversation. When we have community meetings, we frequently have the same people, which is good, but we also need to welcome new people and have them feel comfortable and really welcome.
- I do feel it is important to make sure there are communication platforms available. Ways to communicate, ways to open up discussions to and for the community. I'm not sure what that looks like right now, but more importantly I'm also not confident in what it will do. It's really nice to have avenues for getting input, but I'm just not confident in how or if that will work. I feel a bit like I'm not sure this will happen - I feel a bit, maybe, cynical. I will say though that whatever platforms for communication are created they need to be for everyone in the community. Open and available to everyone's input, not just for people higher up in the community or with easier access.
- I think continuing to have platforms for communication is very important. We have to let the community know that “we're listening,” that “we want to hear you.” But what we really need is action. Action items. How do we show the community we are listening? But more importantly, how do we show the community that we can act on what they tell us? Can we show them we are going to make sentencing fairer? We say we are listening, but we have to be sure to do the work as well. That's what I'd really like to see.

3.3 Good start

- I certainly think this is a good start. I know they are working on strategies to engage the community. I think these sessions should happen more often and there should be more than just information sharing. There should also be planning, plotting and sharing the discussions. It's a good start. I want to see more...we need to move from talking to action.
- I agree with (the previous participant). This is an awesome idea and an excellent way to start a conversation.

- What is being done now is an effective start. As a result of Covid this forum is virtual. The CJC should continue to take advantage of the virtual forum so that more people all over can be reached. I am calling in from out of state. People have been impacted by this case all over- beyond Milwaukee and the virtual format allows various voices to be heard.
- I agree with all the comments so far. Just like the judges were talking about, it's good to have conversations happening. But having conversation alone is a pretty low bar to set. At least it's a start, though. I do think that before we have meetings and conversations with the community, we need to have a plan for action steps. How are we going to take the input we get from the community and implement it? What is the plan. How are we going to make use of the comments and inputs we gather? It is one thing to have a system in place, it's another thing to enact the plans for the public good. Right now, different public sectors are treated differently from each other. We need to rectify this. More power to the people! I can't provide solutions, but I know we need to find them.

3.4 Spread the word

- We need to spread the word through social media and as many channels as possible to let more people participate. It really is key to use technology to eliminate the excuse that it is inconvenient. When the weather changes it will be essential to get people in conversations with each other and this virtual technology will allow us to do that.
- I am wondering about spreading knowledge. Media has highlighted what should be in textbooks and that certain districts are opposed to teaching about systemic oppression that puts America in a bad light. What are your thoughts on that?
- There are little libraries all over my neighborhood and other neighborhoods in Milwaukee- so we should start putting books in there about our history. We should spread the knowledge that has been stolen and hidden away. We should flood our communities with that knowledge too and share it with all of our children. I am buying up the books that have been meaningful to me and sharing them with young people who want to read.
- There is a book drop box near me and I will do that!
- Every time one of my fraternity brothers reads a really good book, he buys up a number of them and shares them with others.
- I grew up in the center of the confederacy and I learned that it was not the "Civil War" but the "War Between the States". I was taught a distorted view of the country and history. It is essential that we have educators who know true history and teach it. It is essential that we elect school board members who believe in education and teaching full history.

Connected Conversation

4.1 Trust and Transparency

- We need to establish a level of trust to foster further dialogue regarding all of the inequities in the system for people of color. Incorporate Twitter messages and Facebook if appropriate.
- I agree—we need to establish trust and bring more civility and understanding between the criminal justice system and the people who are negatively impacted by it.
- It's hard to say how to bring legitimacy to a broken system. It's almost as if when an issue happens in the black community it's automatically harsher sentencing. Also there needs to be more transparency.

- First and foremost, transparency. Because there is no trust. I think the system is working exactly how it's supposed to. It's taking from the community and not putting anything back in. (In one particular case I know of) the social worker was white, the teacher was white, the prosecutor was white, the judge was white. Everyone in the whole process was white.

4.2 Juvenile Sentencing

- I don't understand the decision on how a juvenile is waived into adult court, even after hearing Judge Geske tonight. I think juveniles are being given very harsh sentences.
- I don't think that the youth feel that they're getting a fair shake. Most people carry out these crimes without understanding what's going to happen. Whatever happens, they feel everything is against them. That doesn't deter them from doing the crime.