

National Association of Women Judges

District 2

Annual Report

Meetings / Conferences / Annual Dinner

Many District 2 members attended the IAWJ conference in Washington, DC, and their feedback on the conference from the District 2 delegation was overwhelmingly positive (see photo below of some District 2 members at the IAWJ Gala dinner on May 29, 2016).



From left to right: Hon. Betty Williams, Hon. Robyn Sheares, Hon. Sally Unger, Hon. Kathy King, Hon. Helena Heath Roland, Hon. Tanya Kennedy, and Hon. Abena Darkeh

On June 2, 2016, a group of Nepali women judges visited New York and met with the Hon. Fern Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for NYC Courts and Director of Access to Justice Programs, regarding access to justice initiatives in New York State Courts.

On June 29, 2016, the New York Chapter of District 2 hosted its annual dinner which was attended by more than 130 guests, including NAWJ Executive Director, Marie Komisar, Darcel Clark, Bronx District Attorney and former Director of the New York Chapter, NYS Chief Judge, Janet Di Fiore, and Leslie Stein, Associate Judge of the Court of Appeals, who were honored at the dinner (see photos attached).

On September 29, 2016, NAWJ, District 2, will host a reception at the Brooklyn Bar Association to welcome new judges and to present our annual Access to Justice scholarship. The scholarship will honor the memory of Hon. Judith S. Kaye, former Chief Judge of New York and NAWJ member. Hon. Robin K. Sheares and Hon. Leslie Stroth served on the scholarship committee. Based on the number of outstanding applications received this year, they recommended that we award two scholarships. The New York NAWJ chapter agreed to fund the second scholarship. The recipients of the *NAWJ Hon. Judith S. Kaye Scholarships* are: Ellie Miske of the University of Connecticut School of Law, and Astrid Quinones of Syracuse University School of Law.

Congratulations to Hon. Tanya Kennedy who has been nominated as President Elect of the NAWJ, and Hon Kathy J. King who was nominated as Secretary of the NAWJ Board of Directors.



Hon. Tanya Kennedy



Hon. Kathy King

Women in Prison Committee

On June 1, 2016, Judge Betty J. Williams, and NAWJ members, Rhonda Tomlinson, Esq, and Jaya Vasandani, Esq., facilitated a forum at Brown Memorial Baptist Church “How to Organize a Women in Prison Project”. The Brown Memorial Ever Ready Ministry requested advice from Judges Williams and Cheryl J. Gonzales on how to provide services to incarcerated women, formerly incarcerated persons and their families. Rhonda Tomlinson, Supervising Administrative Judge of the New York State Parole Adjudications Bureau, attended the forum and explained support services provided by the Harlem Parole ReEntry Court. The Harlem ReEntry Court is the only court in New York State that provides re-entry services exclusively to formerly incarcerated persons. Judge Williams explained the NAWJ WIP Committee’s mission and outlined its projects in New York State and nationally. Jaya Vasandani, Co-Director, Women in Prison, provided a list of agencies and community based organizations (attached) that provide re-entry services to formerly incarcerated women and men. Ms. Vasandani invited a colleague, a former incarcerated woman who is a member of the Brown Memorial Baptist Church, to join the panel in her absence. The Brown Memorial member panelist was recommended as the point person to facilitate the Ever Ready Ministry prison project during the planning stages. The following recommendations resulted from the forum:

1. Survey churches, congregations, and organizations for formerly incarcerated persons and family members of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons (the target group);
2. Survey community based organizations for i.e. services provided to the target group and their families;
3. Complete a Needs Assessment based on survey results;
4. Coordinate all activities and share information/resources with the community;
5. Develop service projects to address the identified gaps in services.

The Minister who opened the meeting, and welcomed all of the attendees, expressed interest in collaborating with political leaders and stakeholders to establish a Brooklyn Parole Re-Entry Court in Kings County. The Ever Ready Ministry will: (a) review and revise an already established letter writing project at Brown Memorial and incorporate specific suggestions from the panelists, and the group will: (a) review and revise an already established letter writing project at Brown Memorial and incorporate specific suggestions from the panelist and the group; and (b) establish a committee (4 to 5 church members) to be available to provide support and information to the target group and family i.e. how to access government and community based services. The panelists agreed to be available for consultation.

On June 3, 2016, the NAWJ Women in Prison Committee co-chairs, Brenda Murray and Betty Williams, along with members of the NY NAWJ Women in Prison Committee visited the Metropolitan Detention Center (“MDC”) where many women from Danbury were sent in 2013. Currently, MDC has a population of 161 women of whom 111 have already been sentenced. There are 24 women remaining from the original group transferred from Danbury, and 23 of these women are eligible to return to Danbury when it is slated to reopen in October

2016. We found many of the issues identified in our visit in March 2015 unchanged. We were unable to get a firm date for their return to Danbury, or to obtain details about the construction progress at Danbury. The Committee issued a report which was discussed in the online publication of Reentry Central. The committee also made a request to the Bureau of Prisons to visit Danbury to assess the progress made on the women's facility. To follow up on the issues raised in the report, NAWJ President, Lisa Walsh, wrote to the Deputy Attorney General, Sally Q. Yates. Marion Feather, the Deputy Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, responded to the letter, and offered to meet with The NAWJ Director and the Committee regarding our concerns and priorities for the Danbury facility. The meeting is scheduled for October 11, 2016, and the visit to Danbury will be scheduled after this meeting.

In a letter dated July 13, 2016, NAWJ President, Lisa Walsh, wrote to Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci of New York State Department of Corrections and thanked him for responding to Justice Betty Williams' request to have him to address the issue of the reported inadequate supply of feminine hygiene products provided to the incarcerated women in some of the facilities of the New York State prison system. Commissioner Annucci issued a directive directing that the women be adequately supplied with the necessary feminine hygiene products and instituted a practice of follow-up and monitoring to ensure compliance with the directive.

Human Trafficking

Since New York State enacted perhaps the nation's strongest anti human trafficking statute in 2007, there have been 425 arrests statewide for sex and labor trafficking. However, all but 80 of those arrests have been in New York City. In the Third Judicial District, which includes the counties of Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Schoharie, Sullivan and Ulster, there have been only nine arrests. Is the upstate region virtually devoid of the trafficking problem that plagues the rest of the nation, or is the potent and powerful 2007 law under-utilized? This issue was addressed in a program on Human Trafficking on June 16, 2016 at Albany Law School which was co-sponsored by the New York NAWJ chapter, the New York State Bar Association, the Judicial Council, and the Capital District Women's Bar among others.

COLOR OF JUSTICE/MENTOR JET

Our second annual "Color Of Justice" programs were held in Brooklyn and Queens counties in New York.

On March 18, 2016, Judge Shillingford organized a "Color of Justice" program in conjunction with the Bedford Stuyvesant YMCA for students from various high schools in Brooklyn.

On Friday May 6, 2016, NAWJ members from Queens County and the Queens Women's Bar Association conducted a "Color of Justice" program for 49 students at the Queens County Criminal Court.

GAVEL GAP

The New York chapter of NAWJ, along with three chapters of the Women's Bar Association, will sponsor the following program on November 5, 2016 in Rochester, New York entitled "GAVEL GAP": WHY NEW YORK'S JUDICIARY DOES NOT REFLECT THE STATE'S POPULATION. The inspiration for this program arose from an article in the New York Law Journal which discussed a publication by the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy, entitled "Gavel Gap: Who sits in Judgment on State Courts" authored by Tracey E. George and Albert H. Yoon. The publication discusses in detail the issue of diversity in state courts in the United States, with specific findings about women and minorities.