



**Gail Stone, Law and Justice Policy Advisor, Office of the King County Executive, retires from the Gender & Justice Commission, and encourages other local government policy-makers to get involved with the Supreme Court's Commissions**

*Judge Marilyn Paja, Co-Chair of the Gender & Justice Commission had an opportunity to have a long conversation with Commission member Gail Stone in May of 2019 when she retired (due to term limits) as a Commissioner. Ms. Stone remains active in the organization as a member of the Incarceration, Gender & Justice Committee.*

### **What is your background and why did you choose to be involved with the Gender & Justice Commission for over 6 years?**

For 9 years, I've served as Law & Justice Policy Advisor in the Office of the King County Executive. In this job I help with anything that might affect the courts and the legal status of the county, everything from jail overpopulation and the Involuntary Treatment Act, to homelessness, and court project facilitation such as the juvenile justice building and firearms surrender requirements imposed by state and federal law when someone is convicted of a domestic violence (DV offense). In the past I worked for a law firm with an interest in state policy, for the State Bar Association as a lobbyist, and for the state Legislature as a leadership staff attorney.

I've seen all three branches of work. I remain impressed by the work of all the public servants in each branch of government. Each branch has its strength in issues of policy. The strength of the courts is to convene everyone together to talk responsibly and at length about issues of common interest. Supreme Court leadership is the key. In times of partisanship, operating under court rules of justice allows us all to focus on policy, not politics.

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For example, an issue related to how fairly women and girls are treated in a correctional facility has equal interest to the state as it does to local government. Why are more women and girls being incarcerated (to me the numbers seem shocking)? Should women and girls have different resources available to them in custody than do men? Why or why not? Is there a discriminatory element to the statistically disproportional increase of women who are incarcerated? How can we measure that? Is this an issue for the court policy group or for advocates or the legislature to tackle? Who needs to be 'at the table' to make improvements? How can the courts help convene the right people to research or solve the problem identified? These kinds of conversations need both local information and a high-level perspective.

On issues such as incarcerated women and girls, the broadly-based membership of the Commission, judges, court clerks, advocates, lawyers, professors and researchers enables more practical problem solving. Each Commission brings their own expertise and circle of professional colleagues into the problem-solving approach.

### **Why is it important that local government consider participating on the Commission or its committees?**

While the Gender and Justice Commission is a statewide commission formed under the auspices of the Supreme Court, its substantive mission includes issues that affect the lives of our shared constituents.

Washington has a non-unified court system that makes counties responsible for a large percentage of the costs of district and superior courts. Counties are also responsible for jails, prosecution, public defense, and county sheriff offices. The Commission's work on domestic violence, incarcerated women and girls, the Tribal State Court Consortium, and LGBTQ legal issues has a statewide benefit. The court and community leadership around the commission's table brings institutional authority, resources, and powerful influence to bear on these issues, in a judicial (and thus non-partisan) forum. And when the Supreme Court invites other state agency leaders to the conversation, those leaders show up, ready to engage. Relationships forged at this table serve local governments well beyond any individual member's term.

**Why was King County (through you and your position with the County executive) involved for so long and in such detail?**

The lives of our residents are impacted at the intersection of policy (legislative branch) and implementation (executive branch), and to resolve disputes about those impacts to individuals is the responsibility of judges (judicial branch). Democracy and governing are messy and challenging and constantly evolving, and we owe it to the people we serve to work together.

State government officials create big policy issues, but it is often up to the local jurisdictions (and we come in all sizes and with our own priorities and politics) to implement that state-created policy. To sit at the Gender & Justice table is to be involved in creating policy within our community that can reflect the needs and resources of the local communities – not to mention our personalities! The fabulous women and men around the large and inclusive table are both inspiring in themselves and for the work they continue to do on issues of importance to all of us in our State. To have a Supreme Court Justice as our Chair demonstrating the level of commitment by the court is awesome.

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**From your personal perspective, why you have been involved for so long; and perhaps in a way that might encourage other representatives of local government to consider participation ...?**

I've worked in all three branches of government and at both the state and county level. Our society, our communities, face challenges and inequities (whether long-standing or emerging). My personal passion is working with others to find the common ground, however small it might be, and build from there to see how large we can make it. I've worked with and for elected officials for a long time, and I'm not naïve about the realities of politics. Good people can hold strongly divergent views for good reasons. At the same time, there is sometimes a space, or a moment, or a shared experience, where it's possible to come together and do good. The Commission provides that forum.

But for term limits, I wouldn't be leaving the Commission; however as much as I value the expertise of veterans in my work, that is overcome by fresh perspectives. This blend of experienced and new membership keeps the Gender & Justice Commission dynamic and relevant.