



December 9, 2021

Washington State Center for Court Research  
Strategic Oversight Committee

RE: Following through on operationalizing the Washington Supreme Court's June, 2020 letter  
([Judiciary Legal Community SIGNED 060420.pdf \(wa.gov\)](#))

Dear Committee Members,

Carl McCurley has discussed with me your intent to make changes that promotes the equal administration of justice to Washington's judicial branch, consistent with the vision of the Supreme Court's letter from June 2020. We explored the proposal's purpose and components and he asked me specifically to comment on practicality, feasibility, and impact.

The Washington Supreme Court's June 2020 letter is inspirational and bold, based on facts and reflecting the realities of institutionalize racism. It states "The injustice still plaguing our country has its roots in the individual and collective actions of many, and it cannot be addressed without the individual and collective actions of us all." The letter is clear – there are necessary changes in the operations of the justice system, changes that will remedy unequal administration of justice associated with racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups in Washington.

The Data for Justice proposal describes a feasible and effective strategy that enables the courts to understand where disproportionality emerges in the justice system and provides a way to track the impact of changes that you have designed to promote equal administration of justice in Washington. If change is to be effective and sustainable, everyone in the courts must act with intention. Judicial branch leadership, courts' administrators and managers, and court line staff all have distinct roles to play. These actions ideally are supported by courts' professional associations (such as the trial court judges associations and court administrator groups) and aligned activities of independent court professionals, such as defenders and prosecutors. The Administrative Office of the Courts also has specific responsibilities related to several proposal aspects. And it is important to note that Washington residents who have been court-involved are able provide perspective and feedback on priorities and changes to policies, programs, and practices.

The changes enabled by the Data for Justice initiative may be fundamental and far-reaching. With careful planning, cooperation, and a willingness to learn from experience, I believe the idea of more equitable justice can lead to systematic changes. Be assured that precedents of big changes in public agencies that led to improved life chances for members of the public. For example, changes in child protection enabled by the Indian Child Welfare Act, support for self-determination in disability services, environmental mitigation for clean water all illustrate how potent changes in public administration can be for society.

As I look at the commitment expressed by the Court in 2020, it is clearly bold and decisive. But the ideas need a comparable set of institutional actions. I believe the Data for Justice initiative provides important infrastructure that brings the judicial commitment to action.

As a newcomer to the state of Washington, I am heartened by this initiative. Although I have heard many espoused values concerning racial equity, I know from my own study of organizations and social movements that espoused values will be insufficient. As a top five school of public policy and governance in the country, the Evans School stands poised to work with the Court as a partner, to assist in redesign efforts, training or data analysis. We look forward to ongoing conversations and – at a minimum – cheering you on throughout the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jodi R Sandfort". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jodi R. Sandfort, MSW, PhD  
Dean