

President's Column

Chris Williams

I recently attended Jury Summit 2001 in New York City. We learned many innovations for juror accommodation. Jurors interacted with judges and supportive court personnel to assist in making each juror's service more pleasant.

The jury system must be preserved and protected. I want to thank New York Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye for hosting this excellent conference on the jury system. The consensus there was that "one-day, one-trial" jury service is a success in all of the jurisdictions that have implemented it. Having no exemptions for anyone also improves the representativeness of jury panels. With more diverse and sophisticated panels, civil and criminal decisions were found to be more just and fair.

Methods of jury selection must change in most jurisdictions, using multiple lists (such as voter registration plus driver's license and/or motor vehicle registration) to ensure appropriate panels for each court. Each state that has not adopted one-day, one-trial must soon look to this jury reform to encourage the populous to get more involved in the jury system. The greater number of individuals called for jury service will improve public trust and confidence in the court and the jury system. Ninety percent of jurors who were interviewed after one-day, one-trial service were impressed with the efficiency of the jury system and court performance.

Jury systems can grow stronger with better orientation of jurors, better understanding of court procedures, judicial outreach programs to explain courts to the community, and appropriate conferences between the bench, bar, and media. Proceedings from Jury Summit 2001 can be found online at <http://www.jurysummit.com>.

I also attended the National Center for State Courts Americans with Disability Task Force meeting in Williamsburg, Virginia. Chief Justice Ronald T.Y. Moon of Hawaii is the chairperson of this task force. As your representative from the American Judges Association, we discussed priorities for how courts can comply with the ADA. Our goal is to develop a website through the National Center to improve dissemination of problem-solving information for courts regarding ADA compliance standards. Funding for this project has been provided by the U.S. Department of Justice. Topics addressed at this meeting included employment of per-

sonnel and compliance steps for reasonable accommodations; programs and public services; public accommodations of court personnel, jurors, witnesses, and spectators; transportation provisions; and accessibility standards. All courts must have an ADA action plan for compliance, give public notice of compliance, and have self-evaluations, transition plans, grievance procedures, architectural barrier checklists, job descriptions, and ADA compliance resolutions.

The National Center is in the process of developing a Web crawler to allow access to ADA updates by entering the National Center's Web page and logging into an ADA information center.

The whole idea is to give prompt answers to common problems judges face when confronted with ADA compliance issues. Issues might include the need for interpreters for the hearing impaired or how to help people with cognitive disorders obtain access to the courts. Data banks will be set up through each state to ensure the availability of interpreters, such as Communication-Access Real-Time (CART) reporters or language-based interpreters for different ethnic groups.

Courts are sometimes in immediate need of support services to comply with ADA requirements. The task force hopes to have all state court administrators on board to help come up with immediate solutions for courts on a moment's notice. The task force will continue work to improve each state's ability to come into compliance with all requirements of the ADA in the next few months.

As members of the AJA, please take the time to thank the Justice Department for its support of state court ADA compliance. Many issues must be resolved. For example, what impact does the method of ADA compliance have on the court process? Can the interpreter or CART reporter be present in the jury room for the deaf juror? What mode of interpretation will best assist the court in continuing a trial without interruption?

It will take lots of hard work to keep judges abreast of all the new developments of the jury system and ADA compliance, but be assured that there are judges who care and who will continue the efforts of improving the judiciary. Thanks to the National Center for State Courts, the State Justice Institute, and the Justice Department for their support.

