

2003 JUSTICE CENTER PROGRAMS

Criminal Court Conference

In October 2003, the Justice Center's first program was a one-day conference held at NYCLA, "New York City Criminal Courts: Are We Achieving Justice?" The conference was co-sponsored with Fordham University School of Law's Louis Stein Center for Law and Ethics and five other area law schools. By invitation, 100 people involved with the Criminal Courts, including judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, victim/witness advocates and academics, heard from speakers such as Hon. Juanita Bing Newton, Administrative Judge of the Criminal Court of the City of New York, then President-Elect Norman L. Reimer and Dr. Freda Solomon of the New York City Criminal Justice Agency. Participants spent most of the day in working groups dedicated to specific topics. The groups identified areas of strength and weakness in the criminal justice system and developed a series of concrete recommendations for improving it. The proceedings were published in the May 2004 issue of the *Fordham Urban Law Journal*.

To provide a sustained focus on the Criminal Court Conference recommendations and to maintain the dialogue with the judiciary, President Reimer set up a **Task Force on the Criminal Courts**, chaired by NYCLA Board Member Susan Walsh, with representation from all the stakeholders in the Court. Subcommittees are working on reforms that will promote alternatives to bail to minimize the detention of poor individuals charged with petty crimes, conducting a four-borough survey of discovery practices and developing an "expungement project" to help minor offenders clear their records to facilitate employment.

Electronic Recording of Interrogations

In April 2003, NYCLA issued a "Report on the Electronic Recording of Interrogations," which calls for the electronic recording of all custodial interrogations of criminal suspects. The Report is aimed at improving the accuracy of criminal adjudications by providing more reliable information about how confessions are obtained, thereby assisting judges and juries in resolving disputes between the police and defendants over whether confessions are voluntary. Reducing the number of false confessions should reduce the number of unfair prosecutions, increase the efficacy of law enforcement, and ultimately enhance public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Although the report was written prior to the Justice Center's creation, the support and advocacy of the Center's Advisory Committee were instrumental in its successful adoption by the New York State Bar Association and the American Bar Association.