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# ***Professor David Logan's Post***

## Diversity in the Rhode Island Judiciary

Posted by David Logan on 06/16/2015 at 11:38 AM



In a May 17 piece ("Race in Rhode Island"), *The Providence Journal* reported that minority populations in our state have increased by nearly 500 percent since 1970, while the white population decreased by nearly 12 percent. The series spotlighted some of the many challenges Rhode Island faces as we become more ethnically and racially diverse.

The changing complexion of society is occurring on the national level, as well, and has manifested itself in shocking stories from Ferguson, Mo., to Staten Island, N.Y., to Baltimore, forcing us to face the reality that many of our fellow citizens do not believe that "justice is blind." Across the political spectrum, there is a broad consensus that police departments should reflect the diversity of the citizens they serve.

While the national conversation has focused on the relationship between police forces and communities of color, we also should pay attention to another group of key players in the law enforcement system, the judges. In Rhode Island, trial judges preside over thousands of cases in which citizens are charged with crimes, from traffic infractions to serious felonies; judges with appellate authority review lower court decisions and establish legal precedents that can bind for decades. Family courts intervene in the most private aspects of our lives, while determinations made in workers' compensation cases can keep a family from falling into poverty.

Unfortunately, the judges who play such an important role in so many Rhode Island lives simply do not reflect the diverse nature of our state today.

Here is the racial and ethnic makeup of our state courts:

- **Supreme Court:** five members, no minorities.
- **Superior Court:** 27 members, 3 minorities (dropping to 2 with the impending retirement of Associate Justice Ed Clifton).

- **District Court:** 15 members, 2 minorities.
- **Traffic Tribunal:** eight members, no minorities.
- **Family Court:** 19 members, 1 minority.
- **Workers' Compensation Court:** 10 members, no minorities.

The data is clear: the Rhode Island judiciary looks like the Rhode Island of past generations, not the current reality. And while our judiciary is populated by judges who are conscientious and fair, such a vast demographic disparity makes it hard for all of our fellow citizens to have confidence in the rule of law.

Now is the time for all those responsible for vetting and selecting our judges to pledge their unequivocal commitment to racial and ethnic diversity, with a goal of 20 minority judges on the Rhode Island bench by the end of 2020. If we work together to meet this important challenge, by the end of this decade the Rhode Island judiciary will once again look like Rhode Island.

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*This blog originally appeared as an [Op-Ed](#) in the Providence Journal.*