

Excessive force and criminal justice system become hot topics on the streets of Columbus

Police shootings of civilians are receiving increasing amounts of local and national media attention, raising awareness about actual and perceived racial inequalities throughout the entire criminal justice system. Columbus has not been immune from this turmoil, and the shooting of a thirteen-year-old boy with a toy gun recently led to protests in and around Columbus City Hall. In response, members of the public, lawyers and political candidates have called for reform of the grand jury process used to evaluate many officer-involved shootings.

While practices vary around the state, since 1980 the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office has presented every police shooting investigation to a grand jury. The grand jury, which meets in secret and is comprised of Franklin County residents, then makes a determination as to whether there is probable cause to believe that a crime has been committed. If there is a shooting by a police officer, the grand jury is presented evidence to evaluate whether there is sufficient cause to indict the officer for using excessive force. Under Ohio law, excessive force is defined as "application of force which, either by the type of force employed, or the extent to which such



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force is employed, exceeds that force which reasonably appears to be necessary under all the circumstances surrounding the incident."

The statewide problem, according to some critics, is that grand jury proceedings are closed to the public and prosecutors have broad discretion to determine if and how evidence about police shootings is presented. In some instances, officers are given the opportunity to testify before the grand jury. That is generally not the case in other grand jury proceedings.

In response to these and other concerns, the Supreme Court of Ohio recently convened a task force to reevaluate the grand jury process in Ohio. The task force commended county prosecuting attorneys for their "high integrity and

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professionalism." The report also acknowledged that public perception of secret grand jury proceedings may warrant change in the grand jury system to further assure the public that police use of force cases are investigated and prosecuted. The task force recommends that all lethal use of force cases in Ohio be prosecuted by the Ohio Attorney General's Office to ensure uniformity and to alleviate any public perception of a conflict of interest between a prosecutor and a law enforcement agency.

For readers wanting to learn more, please consider attending "Privilege and Selective Enforcement" at the Columbus Bar Association on Nov. 9. For more information on this CLE program, visit www.cbalaw.org.

Resources, websites aim to educate voters on judicial candidates

In 2014, a study conducted by the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron found that half of respondents reported voting less frequently for judges than other races, with three-fifths citing a lack of knowledge of the candidates as their reason for the drop-off. With judicial races on the ballot once again, bar associations and courts across the state are hoping to see an increase in voter activity.

In Franklin County, there are five contested races for the Court of Common Pleas on the Nov. 8 ballot. To help educate local voters, the Columbus Bar created a website that gathers the credentials for each of the judicial candidates in Franklin County. The site, JudgeTheCandidates.org, is a non-partisan voter education portal that houses information on the candidates, recommendations from the Columbus Bar Judicial Screening Committee and results of the annual Preference Poll.

RESOURCES FOR VOTERS:
In Franklin County:
JudgeTheCandidates.org
Across Ohio: **JudicialVotesCount.org**

The Supreme Court of Ohio offers a similar service through its JudicialVotesCount.org website, which includes information about judicial candidates throughout the entire state. The site also offers an overview of Ohio's court system, the judicial selection process and the role judges play in preserving our democracy.

As voters analyze ads and news reports about each of the candidates running for office this year, it may be easy to overlook the judicial races. It is important to remember the role that the judiciary plays in everyday lives and for every voter to learn more about the judicial candidates. ■

Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative renewed for fourth cycle

On Oct. 13, the Columbus Bar Association held its Annual Diversity Meeting, as part of the Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative. This meeting marked the 15th year anniversary of the program.

The Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative began in 2001, when the Columbus legal community made a historic public pledge to significantly increase the racial diversity of its ranks. Twenty of the city's largest law firms joined the Columbus Bar Association, the John Mercer Langston Bar Association, which is comprised primarily of African American attorneys, and the two area law schools, the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and Capital University Law School. Together, they signed a five-year commitment to attract minority law candidates to the city, increase the number of minorities hired out of law school and create an atmosphere that encourages minority attorneys to advance in their firms and ultimately become partners.

The Columbus Bar welcomed speaker Erika Robinson. She presented "Where It Stands, Why It Is Important, and How Is It Developed?" as the keynote discussion of the program. Robinson serves as co-chair of the Pipeline Working Group for the American Bar Association. In addition, two panels featuring representatives from both central Ohio law schools and local chapters of affinity bar associations discussed the pipeline in central Ohio and mentoring in the legal profession.

To learn more about the Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative, visit www.cbalaw.org.

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