

Court Watch Initiative Report 2016-17

Ann Pinna, Chair

1. Our court monitoring team of 12 loyal AAUW members continues to monitor at least one a month (and some of us monitor 3-4 times a month) in Family Court for the purpose of ensuring that women (and men) are treated fairly and justly by the court system, especially in cases of domestic violence. Our purpose is to promote greater accountability by observing judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, and other justice system personnel. Our ultimate goal is to share these findings with members of the judicial system and the community in order to keep victims safe, bring about improvements in the courts, and to promote fair and equal justice for all. We continue to hold several meetings per year where we invite professionals in the field of domestic violence as well as personnel involved in the courts to speak to us and keep us updated on issues and procedures.

Based on our observations and quantitative analysis of our year-long monitoring, a report was issued by our partner in NYC, The Fund For Modern Courts, to the Poughkeepsie Journal. The newspaper article was viewed by judges, court personnel, and citizen of our community, and it detailed ways that the courts might seek to make improvements.

2. Our plan for next year is to continue to monitor as we have been doing, and to make recommendations to the judges and others involved in the judicial system that we deem appropriate to make the court fairer for everyone. We will also continue to invite key speakers to help us understand the court system more fully and enrich our knowledge of what to look for in evaluating court procedures. Our team continues to update and modify our Observation Forms and to share our reporting skills and methods with one another in order to function more efficiently and effectively.

We recently received a call from an attorney in NYC who would like to establish a court monitoring team in her district and is asking for our expertise and help in establishing a program based on our own AAUW initiative. We are in the process of meeting with her to share information so that part of our Court Watch program may be replicated, in part, with others seeking the make improvements in the courts.

3. On Wed, Dec 7, 2016, our Court Watch team was honored with the Duboff Award at a champagne reception in NYC at the firm of Dorsey & Whitney, LLP. The award was presented to us in recognition of our monitoring work and for providing an excellent example of how volunteers help promote the fair and effective administration of justice in the courts of New York State.

In the future, we will continue to monitor the courts, share information with others about our findings, help to make improvements in the judicial system, ensure fair and equal treatment of litigants, educate and improve our skills as court monitors, and engage in helping others in other cities to establish their own court watch initiative programs.