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Final Report of Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Issues

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In a survey of judges, lawyers, litigants and witnesses, the Supreme Court's Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Issues found that most respondents do not believe discrimination based on sexual orientation is a pervasive problem in the New Jersey court system. The survey did indicate, however, that those who identified themselves as gay or lesbian reported problems to a greater degree than the overall population of respondents. While most respondents did not report sexual orientation bias causing unequal treatment or unfavorable outcomes in judicial proceedings, the survey did identify insensitive comments and inappropriate jokes as an area of concern.

Composed of judges, lawyers, non-profit leaders and academics, the 27-member Task Force was appointed by the Supreme Court in June 1997 as part of its commitment to equality for all individuals employed by or using the court system.

In addition to the survey, which asked participants about their experiences from 1993 to 2000, the Task Force conducted public hearings around the state to solicit more information from those having experience with the courts. Their Final Report accepted by the Supreme Court also contains a review of statutes and case law relating to sexual orientation.

The Supreme Court accepted recommendations made by the Task Force, which include wide distribution of the report, continual update of education for judges and court employees, and communication to staff, litigants and their attorneys about how to report incidents of bias or discrimination. It designated Administrative Director of the Courts Judge Richard J. Williams to oversee the implementation of these recommendations and make decisions on the need for further study.

"We are gratified to learn that most people believe they are being treated fairly with regard to sexual orientation," said Judge Williams. "However, we are always working to address problems identified in our court system. Where we find incidents which require us to act, we will not hesitate to do so."

A full copy of the Final Report is available on the Judiciary web site at www.judiciary.state.nj.us or by calling the public affairs office at (609) 292-9580.

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