



*2012*  
*Access and Fairness*  
*Survey*

*The public perceptions of access and fairness in the  
Tippecanoe County Courthouse  
7th Edition*

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## **PURPOSE**

The Tippecanoe County Courthouse is a well-known landmark in the city of Lafayette. When driving through downtown, it is nearly impossible to miss the beautiful architecture of the Courthouse facade. However, the importance of the building rests not in its outside, but rather in what occurs inside. The public's experience at the Courthouse can directly affect its perception of the court system as a whole. If the experience is positive, then the public is more likely to see value in what occurs inside the building. This in turn will lead to a greater trust in the legal system as a whole. A negative experience by the public may translate into a poor opinion of the court system, leading to mistrust and disuse.

Not only can a single experience affect the opinion of the individual, but that individual's opinion can disperse into the community. People are typically willing to share their opinions, and therefore this survey is an important step in creating a positive experience for the public and courts alike. By isolating the elements that are more apt to be ranked as negative, it is possible to improve the public's experience at, as well as the general opinion of, the Tippecanoe County Courthouse as a whole. By finding the negative aspects of the public's experience, it is possible to make improvements that will better the individual experience and the system as a whole.

This survey assigned a numerical value to the opinions of the individuals conducting business in the courthouse. Through this survey, it is possible to quantify the opinions, both positive and negative, that are held regarding the Tippecanoe County Courthouse and the public's experience in it. The quantification can show patterns based upon characteristics such as race, gender, and educational background. Because this survey/study has been conducted in previous years, the courts are able to see how the public's experience in the courthouse has varied.

The purpose of this project is to gather quantifiable data to enable the courts to more easily understand and compare the public's opinion of the courts and the services provided in the Courthouse. As this survey has been done five times in previous years, a comparison of this data allows for the identification of patterns, as well as consistently low points of public opinion. This data can be used to help point those working in the Courthouse to make smart, effective improvements. The survey also makes it possible to calculate how the past improvements have positively affected the public opinion, and which areas still need improvement.

## **PROCEDURE**

The survey was conducted during the weekdays of July 9-16, 2012. In order to get a varied selection, surveys were collected Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 AM-noon and Tuesday and Thursday from 1 PM- 4 PM.

All non-incarcerated individuals leaving the courthouse, through the only available public exit, were invited to fill out the short survey. We received a total of 196 surveys. The same survey used in 2011 was used in 2012.

Section I, the first ten questions, asked respondents to rank the ease with which they had access to the courthouse. Section II, the next six questions numbered 11-16, dealt with fairness in the court. All fifteen of the statements gave a scale of 1-5, with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strong agree. Section III asked for general background information such as the court or office the patron visited that day, gender, race, and education level. Below Section III was space for additional comments.

The survey used is included on the following two pages.

Your Opinion Matters

Access and Fairness Survey: Tippecanoe County Courthouse

**Section I: Access to the Court**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Finding the courthouse was easy.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The forms I needed were clear and easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I felt safe in the courthouse.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The court makes reasonable efforts to remove physical and language barriers.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I was able to get my court business done in a reasonable amount of time.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Court staff paid attention to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I was treated with courtesy and respect.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I easily found the courtroom or office I needed.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The court's Web site was useful.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The court's hours of operation made it easy for me to do my business.	1	2	3	4	5

**Section II: Fairness in the Court** (Answer only if you appeared before a judicial officer today)

11. The way my case was handled was fair.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The judge listened to my side of the story before he/she made a decision.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The judge had the information to make good decisions about my case.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I was treated the same as everyone else.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I know what to do about my next case.	1	2	3	4	5

16. I am represented by an attorney. If Yes: My attorney was appointed by the Court. Yes/ No

If No: I am not represented by an attorney because of financial reasons. Yes/ No

**Section III: Background Information**

17. Which court or office did you visit today? (Circle all that apply)

CASA	Circuit Court	Clerk's Office	Elections & Registration	Magistrate
Probation	Prosecutor	Public Defender	Superior Court One	Superior Court Two
Superior Court Three	Superior Court Four	Superior Court Five	Superior Court Six	Office of Child Support
Other: _____				

18. What did you do at the court today? (Circle all that apply)

Search court records/ get documents	File papers	Make a payment
Get information	Appear as a witness	Attorney representing a client
Jury Duty	Attend a hearing or trial	Law enforcement/ probation/ social services staff
Other: _____		



## SUMMARY

This report highlights the seventh phase of findings and compares them to findings from the previous six years. It also makes recommendations to improve the survey for the next edition.

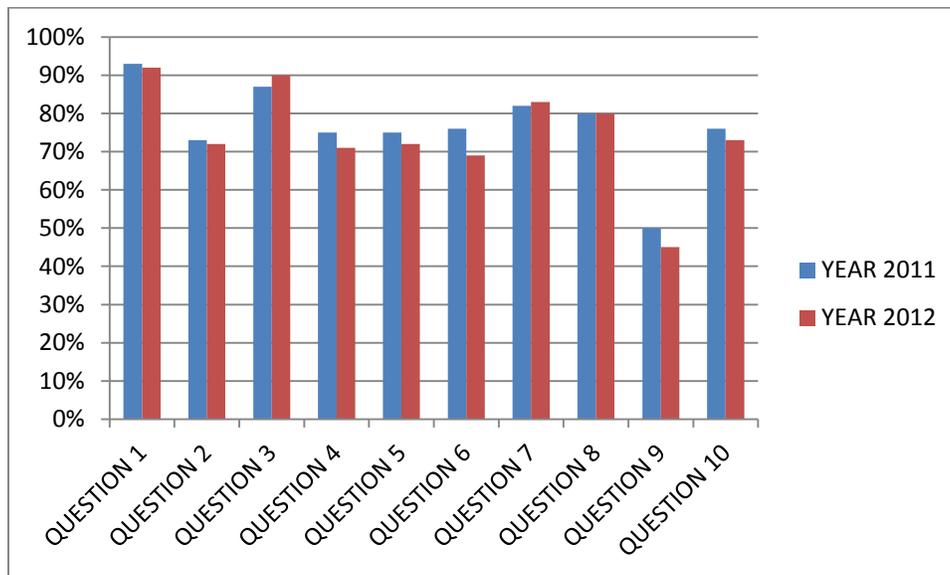
For the purpose of this report the “Access Index” is derived from Questions 1 through 10, which asked participants about customer service and consumer disposition. The “Fairness Index” is derived from Questions 11 through 16, which asked about the public’s perceptions of procedures and outcomes within the court. The individual question indices are the percent of respondents who answered “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to that question. The Access and Fairness Indices are the average of the individual question indices. The composite index scores are useful because they rely less on the wording of any single question and because they reflect the fundamental components of macro level concepts.

### SECTION 1: ACCESS

What is the “Access Index?”

The Access Index is used to measure the perceived ease of use of the Courthouse and the various courts and offices. The overall response pertaining to Access averaged an index of 74.7%. This is a decrease of about 7% from 2011.

#### ACCESS BY QUESTION



Our team received positive feedback on the accessibility of the Courthouse. The vast majority of our sample population found the Courthouse easy to locate. However, some respondents had difficulties finding the specific court they needed to attend and some respondents suggested a Not Applicable option, especially for the questions regarding the website and accessibility of forms.

Question by question analysis:

Question one shows that the ease in finding the Courthouse has stayed relatively stable from the previous year, decreasing by only 1%.

Similarly, question two, pertaining to the ease and accessibility of forms needed, remained relatively stable, decreasing by 1% from the previous year.

Question three, regarding safety in the Courthouse, increased by 3% from the previous year, which puts this year's percentage on par with the 2009 and 2010 responses.

Question four shows a decrease by 4%, representing that respondents are less satisfied with the efforts made to remove physical and language barriers.

Question five saw a slight decrease from 2011 by 3%. The courts are perceived as being not as quick and efficient as in the previous year.

Question six gave a 7% decrease from 2011, which placed this year's responses on par with the 2010 data of question six. This represents that the public is somewhat less satisfied with the way they were treated by the courthouse staff.

Question seven addressed the courtesy and respect with which respondents believed they were treated with by Courthouse staff. Respondents' felt they were treated relatively the same as last year with a decrease of only 1%.

Question eight shows that consumers were able to find courtrooms or offices at the same percentage as both 2011 and 2010.

Question nine pertaining to the Court's website has been getting persistently bad reviews in the past few years, with only 45% of respondents finding the site useful, a decrease of 5% from the previous year.

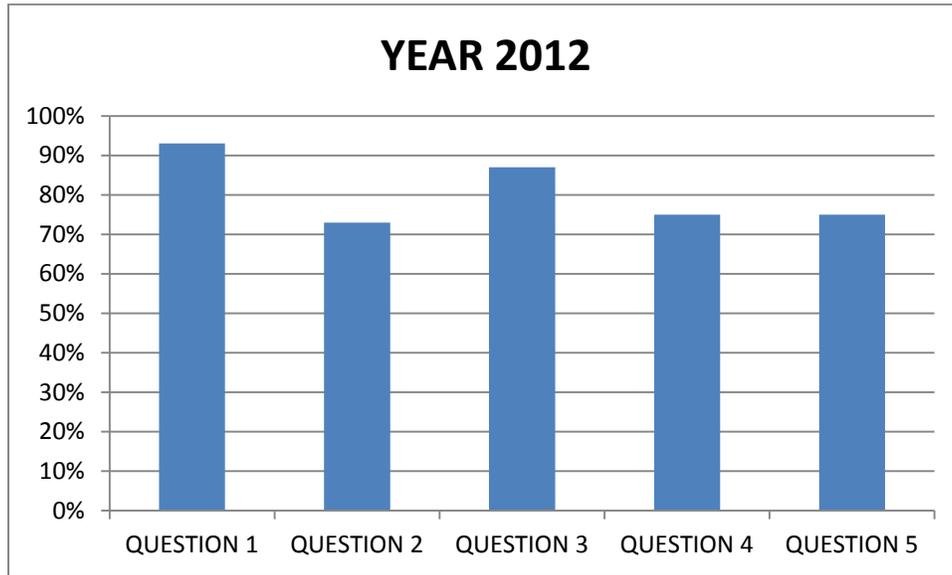
Question ten saw a 3% decrease regarding the Court's hours of operation, with 73% of respondents finding the hours of operation satisfactory. As stated in the previous edition, this is most likely because of the necessity of patrons to complete Courthouse business during their working schedules. Numerous people declined to take the survey because they needed to get back to work.

## **SECTION 2: FAIRNESS**

What is the "Fairness Index?"

The Fairness Index measures whether how the public views the procedures of the courts and its outcomes. The six questions were answered only by participants who appeared before a judicial officer. The overall Fairness Index was 74.6%, a 0.37% decrease from 2011.

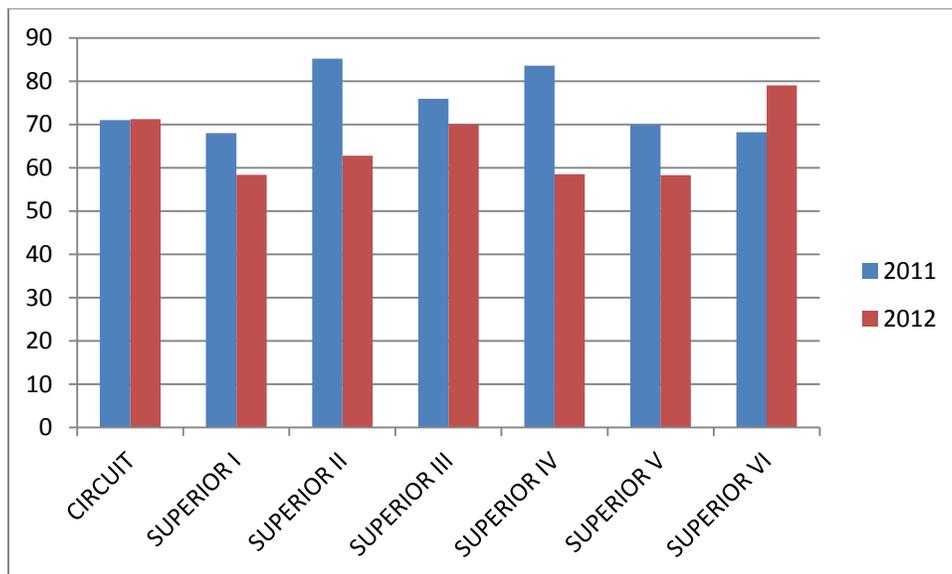
## FAIRNESS BY QUESTION



How does the Fairness Index break down by individual court?

This year's breakdown of the Fairness Index by individual court produced results that were, in some cases, significantly lower than in the previous year. This year the lowest perceived level of fairness by individual court was 58.3%, similar to the finding of 60.4% in 2010, but quite lower than the finding of 68% in 2011. While the Circuit court remained the same as the previous year, every other court saw a decrease in perceived fairness with the exception of a 10.8% increase for Superior Court VI.

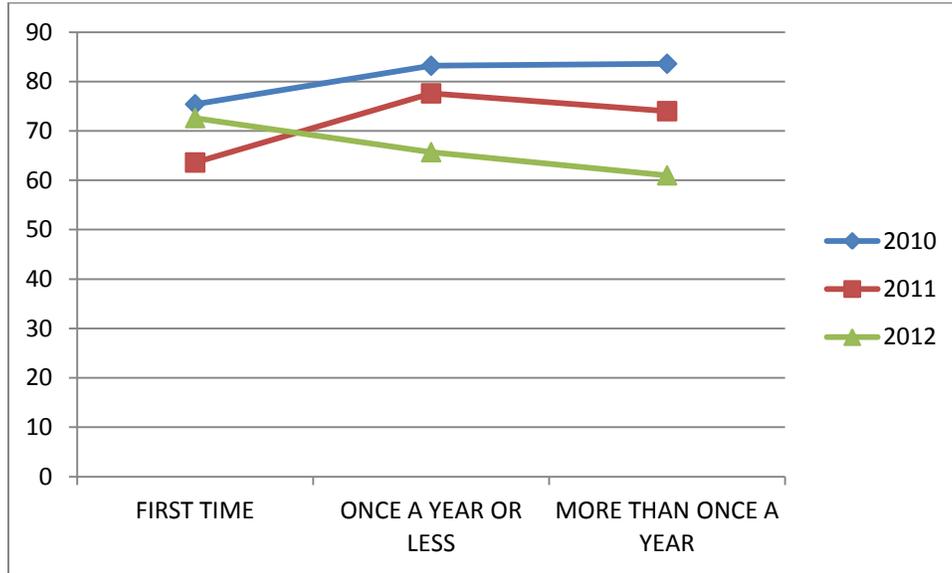
## FAIRNESS BY COURT



Do the Fairness Indices vary between first time court users and those who appear regularly?

Our results show a significant decrease in perceived fairness when comparing 2010 and 2011 to the 2012 data. The 2012 data shows that first time visitors perceive the court as most fair and satisfaction decreases as the frequency of visits increases.

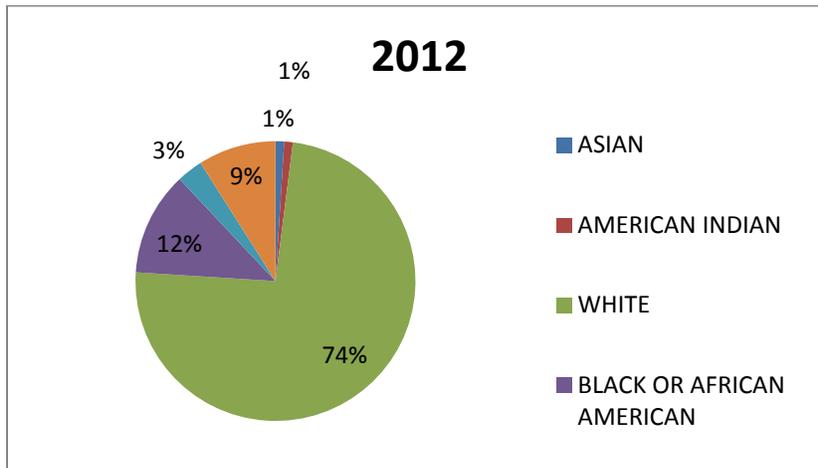
#### FAIRNESS BY FREQUENCY OF VISITS



How does the Fairness Index relate to demographic data?

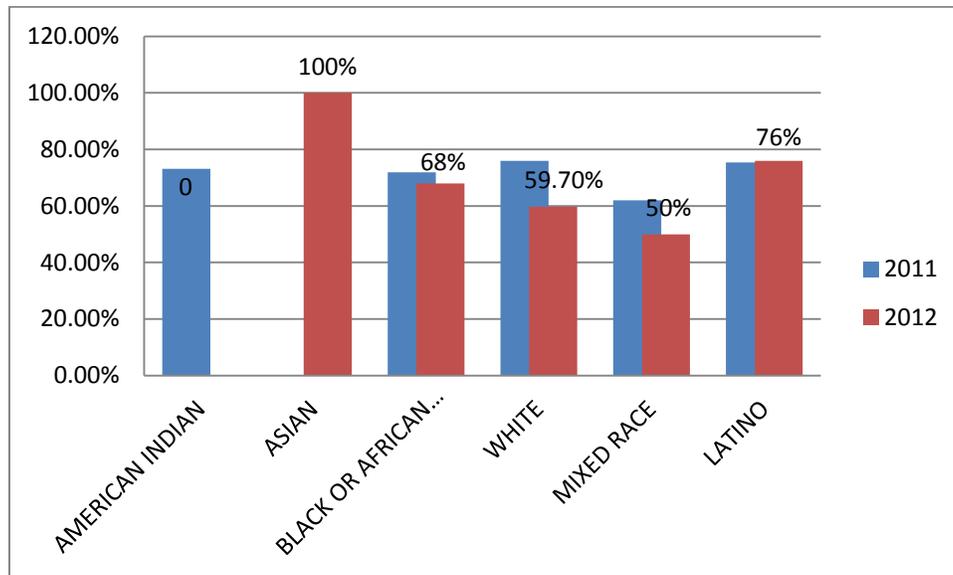
The respondent demographic data shows that, like previous years, the majority of respondents to this survey were white. There was a further decrease in African American respondents, from 29% in 2010 to 16% in 2011 to now 12% in 2012.

#### DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE



The Fairness Index by Race shows slightly lower perceived levels of fairness by African American, White, and Mixed Race respondents while Latino respondents remained consistent from 2011 to 2012. These findings are consistent with the general decline of perceived levels of fairness from 2010 to 2011. The Fairness Index ranged from 50% among Mixed Races to 100% among Asian respondents. Please note there is no data for American Indian's for 2012 and no data for Asian's in 2011.

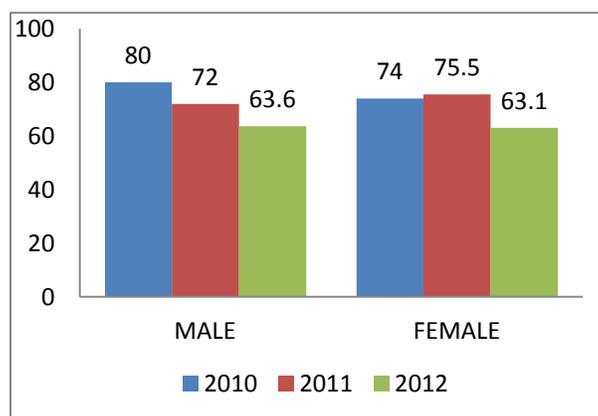
#### FAIRNESS BY RACE



Our results show surveyed males had a perceived level of Fairness of 63.6%, down by 8.4% from 2011. Females had a perceived level of Fairness of 63.1%, down by 12.4%.

#### FAIRNESS BY GENDER

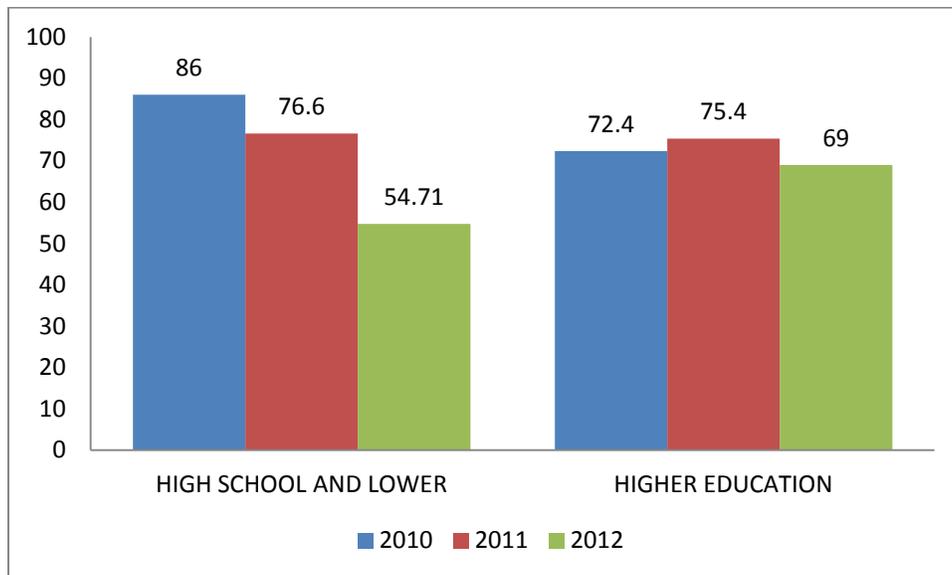
Our results show surveyed males had a perceived level of Fairness of 63.6%, down by 8.4% from 2011. Females had a perceived level of Fairness of 63.1%, down by 12.4%.



How does perceived fairness relate to education?

2012 showed a slight decline of 6.4% in perceived fairness among respondents with higher education and a significant decline (21.9%) in perceived fairness among respondents with a high school education or lower.

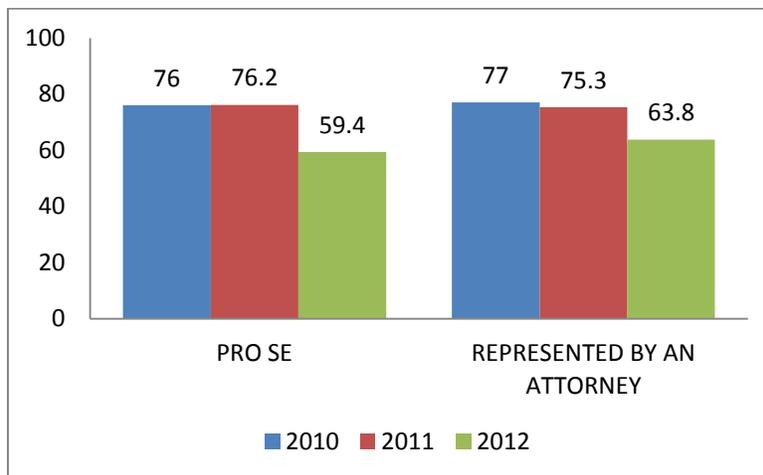
#### FAIRNESS IN RELATION TO EDUCATION



How does perceived fairness relate to Pro Se litigation?

Perceived fairness by both Pro Se and those represented by an attorney were relatively similar, although not nearly as similar as in previous years. Perceived fairness by those represented by an attorney was 4.4% higher than Pro Se respondents.

#### FAIRNESS IN RELATION TO PRO SE LITIGATION



Generally, perceived fairness has decreased from 2011 levels, which is a further decrease from 2010 levels.

## **INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES**

The comments encompassed a wide variety of both complaints and praise. Below we have compiled some of the comments collected from the surveys.

- “I have not visited court often, but when I have I think Judge Meade is a wonderful and fair judge”
- “The judge did his job and my attorney as well however another case that was already taken care of populated again as if it were never handled. As a result of that I now have another court date.”
- “I wish there were more parking spaces.”
- “Stop locking people up.”
- “They don’t care if you have a job or have to pick up your kids they want you to come to court and sit for hours when they want court date at 8:30 and I don’t get done until 2:30.”
- “It is difficult for me to get to the courthouse with parking and walking. It would be nice if you could get in and out on two sides of the courthouse.”
- “Would like to have large directional signs for courtrooms.”
- “The prosecutors have too much power. They don't get to know the accused before they ask for maximum sentencing. Public defenders are ineffective. They are plea-bargainers. Why do paid attorneys always get results while public defenders do as little as possible for their clients. Just enough to be legal. Isn't justice supposed to be blind? Fair to all no matter how much money the defendant has or who their attorney is. It is obvious that money is the motivating factor in judgments rendered.”
- “Always treated well here.” -Out of town Attorney
- “Hate having to plead guilty to get a better deal. The truth does not matter.”
- “I feel the people here are very nice and respectful.”
- “I feel that the judge/prosecutors need to have a little more heart and understanding in cases. Although some defendants may make up lies and stories to help them get a lesser sentence. Some defendants are honest. Please take this into consideration that we are all humans and need to love and respect each other.”

- “I think the courthouse is run great. All the bailiffs are very helpful. My probation officer is great. The judges are all great that I have encountered.”
- “A map to offices with numbers indicating which is which would be smart and helpful.”
- “They need to get people to court in a speedy time not a year later.”
- “The ticket did not direct me into which courthouse I should go to. When I asked a police officer who was present he was very rude and short with me. He did not offer any help basically ignoring me. I wandered around until I found where I should be.”

## **SUGGESTIONS**

In future administrations of the survey and editions of this report, we have put together a short list of some possible suggestions to increase the accuracy and ease of the survey.

- Shorten the comments section by lessening the number of lines.
- Make it clearer that there are questions on the back side of the page by including a “CONTINUE TO REVERSE SIDE OF PAGE” on the bottom right corner of the first sheet.
- Include an option for N/A in the Access and Fairness question sets, because not every question applied to every respondent, an occurrence we believe significantly lowered perceived level of satisfaction with the website.
- Make Question 16, “Am I represented by an Attorney?” more clear. Respondents had a difficult time knowing how to appropriately answer this question and in some cases merely left it blank.
- We would suggest altering Question 22, “What is the highest grade level in college that you completed?” by giving respondents only two options “High School or Below” and “Higher Education”.
- Have judges encourage individuals that appear before them to fill out the survey on their way out of the building.
- Enlarge font on the survey itself to make it easier to read for those who forgot their glasses or contacts.

During the course of the survey we found that the presence of two individuals was more than an adequate number of volunteers to approach the maximum number of people leaving the courthouse. We would also suggest not conducting the survey during the weeks directly prior to and following the Fourth of July. It seemed that traffic in the courthouse was considerably less during these weeks than at times in June or later in July.

It is also important for the survey administrators to have more clipboards to hand out to respondents so they can sit down and fill out the survey instead of crowding around the administrators' table. Otherwise, the problem arose that we would have three or four people filling out the surveys on the administrators' table, thus blocking us from asking other people exiting the Courthouse to fill out the survey.

To continue the observation of public opinion on their Courthouse experiences and to seek improvements to those visits, continuity of this report is vital. The trends throughout the years of specific access and fairness concerns suggest that room for improvement still exists.

## **CONCLUSION**

This concludes the seventh report of the Access & Fairness study conducted in the Tippecanoe County Courthouse, Tippecanoe County, Indiana. Further questions, comments, concerns, or suggestions may be addressed to Patrick Jones at [pjones11288@gmail.com](mailto:pjones11288@gmail.com) or Megan Staub at [mstaub@purdue.edu](mailto:mstaub@purdue.edu).

IMPORTANT NOTE: There were fewer people that filled out the "fairness" section while all filled out the "access" section.