

Ontario names First Nation jury roll panel

Panel to find practical ways to enhance the representation of First Nations on juries

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An 11-member panel that will address the years-long under-representation of First Nations on Ontario juries, will be co-chaired by Alvin Fiddler, deputy grand chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Irwin Glasberg, an assistant deputy attorney general, includes aboriginal leaders, current and former judges, lawyers and policy makers. (CBC)

A panel that will oversee implementation of recommendations aimed at tackling deep-rooted issues facing First Nations in Ontario's jury system will have a majority of aboriginal members, the province announced Thursday.

The 11-member panel, co-chaired by Alvin Fiddler, deputy grand chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Irwin Glasberg, an assistant deputy attorney general, includes aboriginal leaders, current and former judges, lawyers and policy makers.

Other members include:

- Hon. Marc Bode, Regional Senior Justice, Northwest Region, Ontario Court of Justice, Thunder Bay District
- Sheila Bristo, Director, Divisional Support Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General, Court Services Division
- Margaret Froh, lawyer and former president, Indigenous Bar Association
- Diane Kelly, lawyer and former Grand Council Treaty #3 Grand Chief
- Alison Pilla, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs
- Jenny Restoule-Mallozzi, counsel, Union of Ontario Indians
- Jonathan Solomon, former Chief of the Kashechewan First Nation
- Hon. Erwin W. Stach, former judge of the Superior Court of Justice, Kenora District

The committee was the first of 17 recommendations made by former Supreme Court of Canada justice Frank Iacobucci in February.

"A tragically disproportionate number of our First Nation and Metis members are being jailed while entire communities have been excluded from participation in the justice system," Fiddler said. "I am hopeful that, with the Iacobucci report and the formation of the implementation committee, we can finally create fundamental change that will address this crisis."

'Systemic discrimination'

The provincial government initially asked Iacobucci to look into the lack of First Nations representation on juries but uncovered a problem went well beyond that issue.

Aboriginals experience "systemic discrimination" when it comes to criminal justice or child services and the courts -- especially in the north, he said.

"Access to justice, the administration of justice, the availability and quality of legal services, the treatment of First Nations peoples in the justice system all are wanting in northern Ontario," Iacobucci said.

However, the new committee will only focus on the jury issue while the province is promising to establish an advisory group — likely this fall — to deal with the broader justice issues.

Attorney General John Gerretsen said he was confident the new committee had the "right mix of professional expertise and lived experience" to help find practical ways to enhance the representation of First Nations on juries.

Among the members Megan Logan, a college student who will be its youth representative and Marc Bode, a regional senior justice in northwestern Ontario.

Other members include a former band chief, former judge, and an assistant deputy minister.

The implementation committee is meeting over two days as it seeks to thrash out a course of action.

The years-long under-representation of First Nations came to light at coroner's inquests in northern Ontario into the 2007 deaths of two aboriginals.

More recently, Ontario's top court ordered a new trial for a convicted killer because it found the province had violated his rights by failing to ensure aboriginals were properly represented on jury rolls.