



## The Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness

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### **Letter to the Editor**

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For over 15 years, the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness has worked tirelessly to ensure that all Pennsylvanians, regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, gender or other status, are treated with dignity and respect when they participate in Pennsylvania's justice system.

The racially-derogatory comments that Allegheny County Judge Mark Tranquilli allegedly made about a female African-American juror - referring to her as "Aunt Jemima" and stating that "when she goes home to her baby daddy, he's probably slinging heroin too" - demonstrate that the Commission's work is far from complete. Judge Tranquilli's stated presumptions about this juror's inability to render a fair verdict, due to the race she shared with the defendant, violate the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution and the Pennsylvania Code of Judicial Conduct. Moreover, the judge's use of such negative stereotypes is systemically harmful and divisive. They erode public confidence in Pennsylvania's judiciary, confirming perceptions within communities of color of a system that does not mete out justice fairly.

We urge the Judicial Conduct Board to conduct its investigation thoroughly, but expeditiously. Additionally, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania should suspend Judge Tranquilli without pay pending completion of this investigation.