

Justice Court Task Force schedules public hearings

August 21, 2007

Nine public hearings have been scheduled across the state in September and October to discuss Mississippi's Justice Court system. The Task Force studying the Justice Court system will use information gathered at the hearings when it makes a report to the Mississippi Legislature Dec. 1.

Supreme Court Justice Michael K. Randolph of Hattiesburg, chairman of the Task Force, said, "The focus is on what is in the best interest of the people of this state."

Public hearing dates and locations are:

- Sept. 6, Tupelo;
- Sept. 10, Senatobia;
- Sept. 11, Kosciusko;
- Sept. 13, Natchez;
- Sept. 25, Jackson;
- Oct. 1, Gulfport;
- Oct. 2, Hattiesburg;
- Oct. 4, Indianola;
- Oct. 8, Meridian.

Each hearing will be conducted at the Circuit Courthouse in that town. The time for public comment is 6 to 7 p.m. at each location. Each speaker will be allowed five minutes.

The Sept. 25 hearing in Jackson will also include a separate time for representatives of public agencies and organizations to speak. Representatives of governmental entities and organizations may address the Task Force in Jackson between 1 and 4 p.m. at the Hinds County Courthouse. Representatives of agencies and organizations may speak for 10 minutes during the afternoon session. Agencies and organizations are also asked to provide written statements to the Task Force.

The Task Force seeks public comments about specific areas of inquiry posed by the Mississippi Legislature. The Legislature's mandate to the Task Force is to study and assess:

- duties and services provided by Justice Court judges;
- training for Justice Court judges;
- salaries for Justice Court judges;
- jurisdictional limits for Justice Courts;
- Uniform Rules of Procedure for Justice Courts;
- whether jury trials should occur in Justice Courts;
- time and manner of Justice Court elections and the feasibility of non-partisan elections.

Justice Randolph, who will serve as moderator at the public hearings, said speakers should limit comments to the topics specified by the Legislature. He cautioned that the hearings are not for airing complaints about the outcome of a case or grievances about a particular judge. The appeals process through the court system and the complaint process through the Commission on Judicial Performance are appropriate routes for those matters.

"This is not a forum for venting frustrations with a particular judge or ruling. It's about the system," Justice Randolph said.

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