

Justice

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She also sensed a difference in the handling of cases for blacks and whites, "certainly from the judge, the prosecution and the attorney for the defendant."

Ralph Brinkley, a president of Las Vegas' Parents for Children, Inc., complained about unfair treatment during divorce proceedings. A disabled veteran, Brinkley, felt a judge mistreated him because he is black and his ex-wife is white.

"This man took one look at me and decided my case," he said. "The first thing he tried to do was to order me out a H.U.D. sponsored apartment, so that my ex could move into the apartment without myself. In other words, put me out on the street.

"That didn't work out, because H.U.D. got involved," he said.

The judge, Brinkley said, next allowed his ex-wife to take his then 5-month-old son out of state, which forced him to miss many

Energy assistance program accepting applications

Myla C. Florence, welfare division administrator, announced the Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEA) program will continue to accept applications until March 31, 1996.

"The LIHEA program is designed to assist low income Nevadans with the high cost of heating and cooling by paying a portion of their energy bills," Florence said. "Last year, the state was able to help more than 9,000 families."

Eligibility is dependent on the total gross income and countable resources of the household. A single-person household's monthly income cannot exceed 933.75, while the monthly income for a family of four cannot exceed 1,893.75. The value of the household's countable assets/resources cannot exceed \$4,000 for an individual living alone or \$6,000 for a household with more than one person.

The amount of assistance is determined by the household's income level, type and size of dwelling, housing costs, heat source, and climate zone.

Completed applications must be mailed to the LIHEA program, Department of Human Resources, Welfare Division, Capitol Complex, 2527 North Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada 89710 or hand-delivered to 559 South Saliman, #101, Carson City. To receive an application, call 687-4420 (Reno/Carson City); 486-3000 (Las Vegas), extension 4420; or 1-800-992-0900, extension 4420 (statewide toll-free).

first year milestones. He also instructed Brinkley's ex-wife how to approach future court proceedings.

"The fact that I am African-American should have had no bearing on whether my son had two parents," he said.

Lawrence Brinkley, the son, is now 4-years-old and resides with his father 70 percent of the time. This happened only after the judge recused himself from the case when, Brinkley passed out flyers in front of the courthouse calling him a racist, he said.

Several of the panelists said they were moved by the experiences of several people who testified during the hearing.

"It's difficult to deal with many of the frustrations that people

displayed tonight, because we don't have the ultimate decision power to change the system overnight," task force chairman Kevin Kelly, a local attorney himself said.

"It's frustrating for them to tell us something that we can't change overnight. It's going to take time and hopefully we'll all be able to do something positive. That's all we want to do," he said.

Said Simpson, "I'm really surprised about some of the things we are hearing and the depth of some of the things we are hearing about."

The findings and recommendations stemming from the hearings and statistical research about bail, jury composition, sentencing and the behavior of

attorneys and jurists will be presented to the state Supreme Court in September.

"We've got a lot of information, and we're getting some tonight," Simpson said. "There are a lot of statistical information that we have that has all got to be separated and correlated out, so we can't understand exactly what it is saying.

Said Kelly, "We've coordinated with UNLV and UNR to do the empirical collection of data from the court systems and the Department of Parole and Probation and agencies like that.

"Right now, we need the public's input. The more people we have from the public that participate in these hearings, the more information we will have

when we sit down and look at these things to see what we have," Simpson said.

Task force members expect the state's highest court will send their recommendations to the 1997 Legislature but acknowledge changes may not be passed until the 1999 session.

"That's possible, but you don't want to rush it. You want to make sure that whatever you want to do, it's correct," Simpson said.

The task force was formed in 1992 after the riots following the Rodney King decision. Elgin Simpson, president of Community Peace, hosted several workshops with Metro officers, judges and community leaders.

After the meetings, State Supreme Court Judge Charles

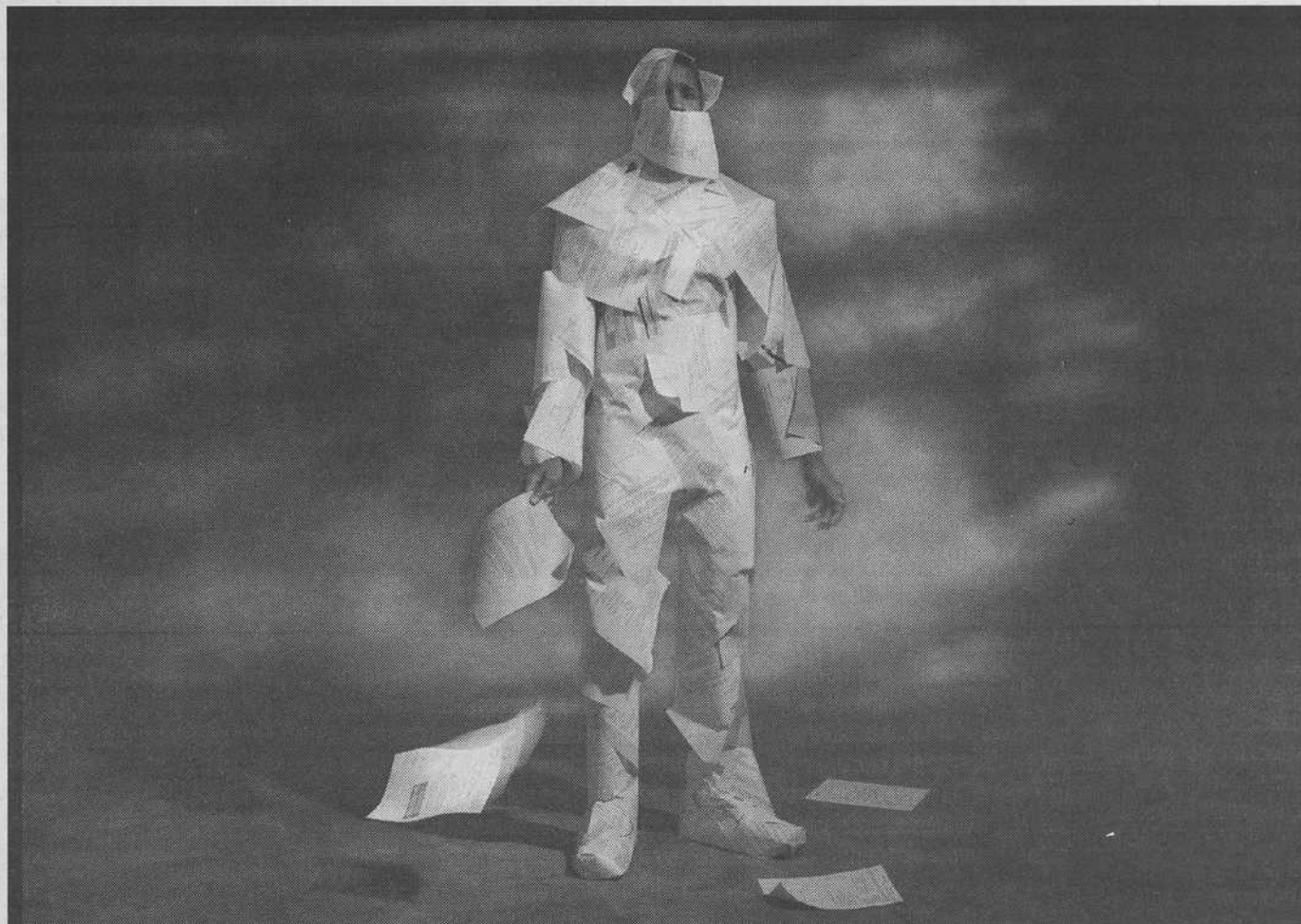
Springer requested the formation of a task force to address concerns raised by the community.

Twenty-seven states across the nation have similar task forces. The Nevada group is operating on a \$225,000 allocation received from the Legislature in July 1995.

The Supreme Court Task Force for the Study of Racial and Economic Bias in the Justice System will hold hearings tonight in Reno; at the North Las Vegas Library, 2300 Civic Center Drive on Friday from 5:30-7:30 p.m.; and in Carson City on April 4.

For more information, call 471-1400.

Staff writer Ramon Savoy contributed to this article.



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