

Superior Court of California  
County of Santa Clara

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San Jose, California 95113  
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June 10, 2019

Zora Z. Williams, BSH, BA, Class of 2019, Stanford University

Dear Ms. Williams:

Thank you for today's presentation, "Parsing Through Predictions: A Critical Analysis of the Credibility and Application of Pretrial Risk Assessment Scores." Among those in attendance were seven Judges of the Superior Court, State of California, Santa Clara County.

You demonstrated outstanding presentation skills. You communicated the essence and the breadth of your research, and you did so with poise.

Overall, the issue is how best to identify persons accused of crimes who should be kept in custody as their case makes its way through the courts? Closely related is the question, are judges relying on unsupported assumptions when deciding if a defendant in a criminal case should be released – or detained in custody – before being convicted?

This topic encompasses complicated factors of race, socio-economic status, the adversarial nature of criminal proceedings, and the very serious and life-altering impact that such proceedings have on the persons involved. The use and research of possible technology ("risk assessment tools") as an aid to improving our criminal justice system involves consideration of political and human factors when evaluating the technology.

You identified major questions such as: do the formulas for risk assessment tools consider enough relevant factors; do the formulas include inappropriate assumptions, such as race or economic need, that result in unfair results; do judges have useful risk assessment tools; if so, how do judges use those tools. You explained your method, the steps you took to gather data, and the interviews and observations that you conducted for actual "in the field" information. And you offered your findings clearly. Of particular note, we find very useful your "hierarchy of information" to organize the range of factors that judges face in the area of pre-trial release and detention.

Your future is bright and those who work with you will be fortunate to do so.

Very Truly Yours,

  
Hon. Theodore Zayner  
Assistant Presiding Judge

  
Hon. Paul Colin

  
Hon. Nahal Iravami-Sami