It continues to be a pleasure and a privilege to serve our community as the Executive Director of the Center for Law and Justice. My deep commitment to equity and justice provides the energy and inspiration that I need to continue. Also, as Director, I am given the distinct honor and pleasure of working with an equally committed staff of people willing to go beyond the call of duty to help those in need whenever they are called upon to do so. We struggle, supported by wonderful student interns and volunteers, to effectively advocate for human rights and provide useful information, a variety of needed human and legal services and basic crisis intervention services, to an increasing number of community residents. Our work also involves seeking appropriate transformative changes in institutional policies and practices that are thought to do harm to our clients.

In 2018, the Center increased its collaboration with other community groups to work for changes in criminal justice, the delivery of health care services, and public safety efforts. Those involved groups and organizations included the Albany Medical College, Drug Policy Alliance, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion), and local grass roots organizations and colleges.

Unfortunately, in mid-year, the Center was faced with a major case involving the police shooting of a 19-year old Black male. The case raised numerous questions and concerns that forced the Center to increase its community organizing and community engagement efforts. We sponsored community meetings, produced a written report critical of an official investigation, urged policy changes in the district attorney’s office and the state legislature, and provided a broad range of support services to the shooting victim and his family. Our involvement was extremely taxing and demanding, but necessary to serve the needs of the young client.

We ended the year even more determined to find new ways to bring about transformative change in vital community institutions that so many of our low-income and residents of color depend upon. We will also seek to empower our constituent population by teaching them how to engage in successful self-advocacy work so that they can assess and demand quality services on their own.

I invite you to read and examine this report not only to learn more about the Center’s work in 2018, but to learn of our plans for the coming year, to offer us your ideas and suggestions for improving the Center’s work, and to join us as we seek important policy changes that can lead to equity and justice for all.
Our Mission

The Center for Law and Justice envisions a peaceful, just and compassionate community and works to ensure, through advocacy and programs that each resident is provided access to the goods, services and opportunities of that community. It also works to establish the fair and just treatment of all people throughout the civil and criminal justice systems, and works to reduce reliance upon incarceration.

About the Center

The Center for Law and Justice was founded by Dr. Alice Green in 1985. For the past 35 years, the Center has been serving low-income and disadvantaged communities in the Capital Region through services, education and advocacy.

One of the primary components of the Center for Law and Justice is facilitating the successful transition of formerly incarcerated individual into their community. The Center strives to educate the community to embrace the entire spectrum of issues encompassed in re-entry, including transition services, The Center also plays a major role in identifying and alleviating individual, social, and institutional barriers to re-entry.

The Center for Law and Justice employs four major strategies to accomplish its objectives: prevention and empowerment, community education and outreach, advocacy, and community organizing.

Prevention and Empowerment

The Center takes calls Monday through Friday from community members seeking help with issues such as criminal justice, discrimination, housing, social services, post-incarceration challenges, and health care. Center staff members provide referrals to community resources and advocacy services on a daily basis. Interventions are sometimes made with agencies when appropriate and requested. Appointments are also scheduled for free services provided at the Center including legal information and health system navigation. In 2019 through the Center’s intake and referral service there were 1,422 direct services and referrals provided by Center staff.
Assistance provided through our Intake and Referral services.

The Center provides a limited number of grocery gift cards to those in urgent need of food, supported by Albany Medical College. Soul Fire Farms donates fresh vegetables to Center clients during the growing season. Heating assistance is provided to needy households during the winter, including help applying for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

Legal information and for civil cases, representation is provided by attorneys who volunteer their time at the Center, and includes criminal, civil, family court, discrimination, student’s rights in school, and probate information. The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York also began providing services at the Center in August 2019 through a grant funded partnership that provides for a designated LASNNY attorney to assist CFLJ clients with legal issues such as public benefits, housing, re-entry from incarceration into housing the work force, and unemployment. The income and resource limits for those cases are expanded above LASNNY’s usual limits due to this partnership. Other legal issues are addressed on a case by case basis – either by the designated attorney or utilizing the streamlined referral process to other LASNNY attorneys and programs or externally to other organizations as appropriate.

The partnership gives CFLJ clients access to a full range of advocacy and legal services in addition to representation in court or at hearings. For example, LASNNY has helped clients assert their rights to accommodations during the DSS
application process and obtain free fingerprinting needed to access their RAP sheets and seal past criminal convictions, apply for certificates of relief or good conduct, and remove errors of past criminal convictions. Through our partnership that allows for expanded income and resource limits, the partnership also gives CFLJ clients access to free legal assistance they would not otherwise be eligible for.

During the 4-month period of August to December 2019 our partnership there were a total of 24 legal intakes completed. 13 referrals for civil legal assistance and representation and 10 completed intakes and referrals for the re-entry project. 1 legal intake was referred to an external organization for assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Aid @ Center for Law &amp; Justice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry Cases, 43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Re-entry Cases, 57%</td>
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**Health system navigation** is provided to clients of the Center by students of Albany Medical College and UAlbany School of Public Health, under supervision from the Albany Medical College Office of Community Engagement. In 2019 there were 55 meetings with Center clients on health and related matters.

Services include help with:
- Insurance enrollment and benefits
- Medical bills and insurance payment
- Finding a doctor or dentist
- Making doctor appointments
- Finding transportation
- Housing issues

In addition to these services, students created educational brochures on flu vaccine and MMR vaccine, researched the effects of juvenile incarceration on health, and identified mental health resources in the community.
Examples of clients who were helped by Albany Medical College at CFLJ:

- A man who is not able to read or write came to the CFLJ for assistance finding an affordable apartment. He uses public transportation but it was challenging for him to travel to new locations for assistance, including for a referral to help with his housing issue, so students and program staff helped him look up bus routes to his upcoming appointments and created customized maps with pictures of what the bus stops and buildings look like so he would be able to navigate.

- A client with multiple health conditions visited the CFLJ many times during 2019. The main issue that Albany Medical College helped with was Medicaid transportation, including ensuring the correct paperwork was on file. This included a great deal of advocacy with the Medicaid transportation system as well as the individual’s primary care provider. Students and program staff then set up Medicaid cab transportation to his multiple appointments and added them to his phone calendar so he would be reminded.

- A man worked closely with a medical student to prepare for an upcoming medical/mental health appointment. The student helped him to write out a plan for the appointment, including questions he wanted to ask and symptoms he needed to describe. This enabled him to communicate with his providers in a clear and calm way, which had been challenging for him in the past. Albany Med staff also called the provider office to communicate this plan. CFLJ and Albany Med staff also worked to assist this client with housing issues and finding longer term case management.

Examples of clients who were helped directly by CFLJ Staff:

- A woman in her 60’s was being denied benefits by a local Department of Social Services due to not meeting work requirements as he was unable to work due to her health conditions. CFLJ was able to determine that the local Department of Social services had her birthday documented wrong by 10 years and when corrected she was in fact exempt from the federal work requirements and was approved for benefits.

- A local man complained of being assaulted by the Albany Police Department. CFLJ staff was able to give him access to the City of Albany Civilian Police Review Board complaint forms and put him touch with an employee to explain the process.

- An elderly woman purchased a car that was in disrepair. CFLJ was able to help her assert her rights under the NYS lemon law and she was refunded the full cost of the car.

- A woman was let go from her job due to a department of health legal review denying her approval to work with a vulnerable population due to a 40 year old misdemeanor drug conviction. CFLJ was able to help her successfully appeal the department of health’s decision and she was successfully reinstated in her position.
• A man was unable to access emergency shelter due to being on Albany County’s “do not shelter list” for many years without review. CFLJ was able to get the man removed from the “do not shelter list” and he was provided with emergency shelter and case management services to help him find permanent shelter.

• A man with physical and mental disabilities had been chronically homeless for 12 years. The Center was able to assist the man through the Albany County coordinated entry housing process and the man was provided with supportive subsidized permanent housing and a case manager to assist with his health issues.

**Capital Region Connections**

The Center produces and distributes this guide for residents of the Capital District and people formerly detained in jail or prison. Funds for printing are provided by the Albany County Legislature. **Connections** is a valuable resource for those reentering the community after being incarcerated, as well as for anyone trying to navigate the Capital Region’s human services.

**Connections** provides information on the following:

Parole  Education  
Financial assistance  Voting  
Housing  Veterans benefits  
Food pantries  Senior citizen resources  
Health care  Legal resources  
Finding a job  Community resources  
NYS prison system  Probation and conditional discharge  
Courts  Sex offender regulations

Copies of **Connections** are available free of charge. Printed copies can be picked up in person from the CFLJ office and are also mailed upon request to individuals currently in prison. An electronic version can be found on the CFLJ’s website. The Center distributed 913 print copies of **Connections in 2019**.
Community Education and Outreach

Know Your Rights Workshops
In partnership with the City of Albany’s Summer Youth Employment Program and the Albany Police Department, the Center organizes and delivers workshops to high school students to educate them on their rights and responsibilities when coming in contact with the police. Sessions are co-facilitated by both an attorney and a police officer, thereby providing participants with an invaluable blend of perspectives and expertise. The workshops cover one’s legal rights and responsibilities during vehicle stops and searches, “stop and frisks” on the street, and house searches. Additionally the Center published and printed 500 copies of “Street Smart” booklets to give to each youth participant as a reference guide and to reinforce what youth learned in these workshops. You’re your rights Workshops for adults and other community groups may be requested by contacting Center directly.

Voting Rights
The Center provides information on its website about voting rights, including the rights of those with criminal convictions. This year the Center partnered with Siena College to develop a framework for Universal Suffrage in New York State. The Center believes in the right of all people to vote regardless of criminal conviction. As part of its voting rights initiative, the Center seeks to educate those who are currently detained in county jails or state correctional facilities, those with a criminal conviction and those on parole, and the community at large about their rights to register to vote. Your organization may request a voting rights presentation by contacting the Center.

Media Coverage
The Center’s Executive Director, Dr. Alice Green, is often the “go to person” for the local media on issues pertaining to criminal justice and law enforcement. As a result, she helps to educate the community on important issues and has written and spoken on topics during 2019 that included police/community relations, racism, the Ellazar Williams case, and criminal justice reform legislation.
Black History Month Film Series
Each February the Center sponsors a film series celebrating Black History Month, in partnership with the African American Cultural Center and the Albany Housing Authority. Films are free to the public and include a discussion after each film. 2019 films included *Black Panther*, *School Daze*, and *Get Out*.

HEAL Community Cookout
Each August, the Center for Law and Justice hosts a community cookout to highlight the Center’s work as part of its HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and LEAD) initiative, and provides community members a chance to network with other organizations that offer resources related to health, housing, legal, and civil rights issues. In 2019, Price Chopper/Market32 generously supported the annual community event and participating organizations included Trinity Alliance of the Capital Region, 518 SNUG, Hudson Valley Community College, Legal Aid, Action Network, BOCES Literacy Zone, SUNY Attain Lab, City of Albany Youth Office, City of Albany Department of Youth and Workforce services, The Red Book Shelf, Addictions Care Center of Albany, City of Albany Police Department (LEAD), and Citizens Police Review Board.

Food from the grill as well as salads and beverages are provided free to community members who attend. Students from Albany Medical College volunteer to help CFLJ staff and interns as they set up and run the event.
New Jim Crow Study Group
Meetings were held every second Monday of the month to discuss issues related to Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. *The New Jim Crow* is a stunning account of the rebirth of a caste-like system in the United States, one that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars and then relegated to a permanent second-class status—denied the very rights supposedly won in the Civil Rights Movement. Jim Crow laws were wiped off the books decades ago, but today an extraordinary percentage of the African American community is warehoused in prisons or trapped in a parallel social universe, denied basic civil and human rights—including the right to vote; the right to serve on juries; and the right to be free of legal discrimination in employment, housing, access to education and public benefits. Alexander shows that, by targeting black men through the War on Drugs and decimating communities of color, the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control, even as it formally adheres to the principle of colorblindness. After more than 10 years the New Jim Crow study group ended in-person meetings during 2019.

Advocacy and Community Organizing

Ellazar Williams

The Center advocated for a fair and impartial investigation in the case of Ellazar Williams, who was shot in the back by an Albany police detective in August 2018 while running away. The officer’s bullet lodged in Mr. Williams’ spine and left him paralyzed from the chest down. Mr. Williams was being chased by police responding to a report of a man with a gun at a convenience store. Williams was not found with a gun, although police reported finding a knife nearby.

A video recording of the event and community outrage led to a grand jury considering charges against the officer who shot Mr. Williams. The Center urged the County District Attorney to recuse himself from the case due to a conflict of interest. That did not happen, and the grand jury not bring charges against the officer, who subsequently retired. Although Mr. Williams was initially charged with felony menacing an officer and criminal possession of a weapon, those charges were later dropped after the Center and community members advocated for the dismissal of all charges as the video evidence did not support charges.
In 2019 the Center spoke out on how the handling of Mr. Williams shooting weakened the relationship between the community and its district attorney and police force. Newspaper editorials and articles mirrored those thoughts, pointing out errors made by the district attorney’s office in handling the case, including lack of transparency and lack of an independent investigation. The city of Albany took the position that they could not discuss specifics on the shooting or their investigation because of a lawsuit filed by Mr. Williams’ attorney, alleging excessive use of force by the police detective.

First Street Incident

In March of 2019 there was an altercation between Albany police and three men at a First Street residence. Police were called by neighbors complaining about loud music. When police were denied entry to the house, a police body camera recorded an officer kicking in the door of the residence. Observers reported the officer then dragging and kicking the man. A bystander outside recorded a cell phone video of another officer beating a man in the street.

The Center for Law and Justice was contacted by several of the victims after the incident. After viewing the police body camera footage, Dr. Green said the video showed officers kicking in the door of a home, dragging a man out and kicking him in the head. “They were atrocious, how the police handled this situation. They had no right to enter the property. They used excessive force – kicked the door in, dragged people out, kicked them. They were doing nothing. They weren’t resisting.” Writing an opinion piece in the Times Union, she referred to the acts of police brutality on First Street as well as the shooting and paralyzing of Ellazar Williams by a police officer as having strained the relationship between the community and the Albany Police Department. As a consequence, she said, we are in danger of losing 10 years of positive strides made through the city’s community policing initiative.
The three men who were assaulted by police were arrested following the incident and charged with inciting a riot, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, obstruction of governmental administration and endangering the welfare of a child. When the bystander video came to the attention of the police chief, he ordered a review of the events, which led to charges against the men being dismissed. Instead, three officers were suspended and one was charged with felony assault and misdemeanor official misconduct. In an interview, Dr. Green stated that some people in our community believe that police always act responsibly and always tell the truth, but unfortunately, that's not the case.

**Grand Street Incident**

In September of 2019, Albany police officers forcibly removed a woman from her car at Grand Street and Madison. A bystander filmed the incident, which showed one of the officers hitting the woman multiple times. One officer tried to push her out of her car from the passenger side while two other officers tried to pull her out of the driver’s seat of the parked car. One officer appeared to hit the woman with his fist roughly eight times as she was pulled from the car, taken to the ground and handcuffed. The woman was charged with obstruction of governmental administration and resisting arrest, as well for parking her car in the roadway.

Police Chief Hawkins defended the actions of his officers, explain that officers were doing regular patrols of the neighborhood when they saw a car parked in the middle of the road. As they got closer, the officers smelled marijuana and asked the woman to leave her vehicle, but she refused. An officer told her that she was under arrest, but she still refused to leave the vehicle. Officers therefore tried to physically remove the driver from the vehicle in order to make an arrest. Chief Hawkins stated, “If they receive a command from an officer, my advice is: comply with that command.”

Dr. Green wrote an opinion piece in the Times Union arguing that some people find it difficult, if not impossible, to comply with an officer’s command. The problem may lie somewhere within the bounds of distrust. A history of abrasive tactics used by police against some residents are seen by many as having a traumatic effect on residents and their community. In turn, they cause stress, fear, non-compliant coping behavior, and wholesale distrust of police. "Yes, residents should comply with lawful police commands when possible, but it is important for police to realize that some residents may find it difficult to follow those demands due to such factors as fear, health conditions that may include hearing loss or mental health problems, or culturally related factors such as language and communication differences. Therefore, the use of more peaceful tactics and resources may be in order."

**Pathway to Reformative Change: Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and the Albany Community**

In the spring of 2019, the Center for Law and Justice administered a survey of over 300 city of Albany residents who responded to a questionnaire asking their opinions and thoughts
on public safety and law enforcement. With some responses eliminated because they lacked a zip code, 256 participant responses were used in the final data analysis. A report of the survey findings was issued, entitled “Pathway to Reformative Change: Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and the Albany Community.” There were four major findings:

1. Many black and brown residents report strong feelings of mistrust of the Albany Police Department.
2. Many of these same residents report strong feelings of mistrust of the Albany District Attorney’s Office. Most participants strongly disagree that the District Attorney’s Office handles cases in a fair manner.
3. Fewer residents than anticipated know of the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program implemented in the City in April 2016. Some doubt the program’s ability to significantly impact mass incarceration and racial disparity in law enforcement. Over 50% of survey participants expressed lack of knowledge about the LEAD program.
4. Several themes were also reported on the qualitative part of the survey where respondents were asked to mention any local event that had an influence on how they felt about law enforcement and/or public safety. Three of the major themes mentioned in order of recurrence were police misconduct, racism, and police conduct in both the First Street police abuse case and the police shooting of Ellazar Williams.

It must be stressed that these findings have significant limitations in allowing any generalizations to be made about the thoughts and feelings of the city’s total population. Hopefully this initial survey will lead to more formal and expanded research efforts which can yield more data and provide greater detail on the issues presented in this preliminary report. But, the findings do suggest that our local government officials should be concerned about the reported responses and use them to more closely examine resident feelings and opinions and to work with community residents and groups to find solutions to reported problems. While community dialogues must be seen as positive, they are not enough to bring about power-sharing and transformative change.

To begin the process of transformative change, a philosophical and practical process dedicated to revolutionary change, the Center for Law and Justice offered a number of recommendations in the report. They are based on the Center’s belief that structural racism is at the core of our community institutions and our social, economic, and legislative policies and we must come to understand how it is manifested, acknowledge its presence and destructive force, and commit ourselves to destroying it. We believe that the task will be extremely difficult, for we share racism expert, Robin Diangelo’s perspective that racism and white supremacy have become the norm and not an aberration as many suggest.

Our recommendations include the need to find ways for our law enforcement agencies and criminal justice system to examine its internal operations to identify the presence of systemic racism and learn ways to address it. Other recommendations are made on how to begin that process. Some point to the need for immediate changes that would require
more transparency and clarification of policies in the Albany County District Attorney’s Office; updating and releasing the Albany Police Department’s racial profiling policy; state investigations of all police shootings and change in civil service law Section 50-A to allow the public to see use of force records of police officers; and the requirement that the heads of our law enforcement agencies prepare and release annual reports of their operations.

This report should not be viewed as a condemnation of any individuals or organization. The purpose of conducting a survey was to give community members an opportunity to voice their feelings and opinions by presenting them a direct method of civic engagement. The findings should be embraced as an opportunity to unite our community in a search for and implementation of transformative changes that will strengthen community/law enforcement relations, improve public safety, promote respect for all our residents, and reduce structural racism. This is our hope.

Legislation

The Center for Law and Justice has long advocated for reform of the bail system in New York State. Along with the Katal Center and other criminal justice reform advocates, the Center promoted reduced use of cash bail and insurance bonds, which placed an unfair burden on poor people and kept many who could not afford bail to remain in jail while awaiting trial. In 2019 the NYS Legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, reforms to eliminate cash bail for defendants charged with most misdemeanors and non-violent felonies, as well as second-degree robbery and second-degree (residential) burglary. The Center has also advocated for repeal of section 50-a of the Civil Service Law, which blocks public access to records on internal police investigations, including alleged misconduct by officers.

Supporting the City and County of Albany

LEAD – Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion

The Center’s Executive Director, Dr. Alice Green, is a member of the LEAD Policy Coordinating Group for the City of Albany. The Center also supports the Operations Work Group and the Community Leadership Team. The LEAD program is a community-based police diversion approach with the goals of improving public safety and public order, and reducing unnecessary justice system involvement of people who participate in the program. The people who participate often become involved in the criminal justice system because of addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and poverty.

Police officers exercise discretionary authority divert individuals to a community-based, harm-reduction intervention for law violations driven by unmet behavioral health needs. In lieu of the normal criminal justice system, individuals are instead referred into a trauma-informed intensive case-management program where the individual receives a
wide range of support services, often including transitional and permanent housing and/or drug treatment.

LEAD was first implemented in Seattle in 2011. The city of Albany was an early adopter in 2016, with the support of Dr. Green and in partnership with Albany City and County. The program has since been replicated in 37 other municipalities throughout the country. Dr. Green also meets with people from other regions who are looking into adopting LEAD in their communities.

**Felony Diversion Program**

This program, sponsored by the Albany County District Attorney, focuses on the diversion of non-violent felony offenses committed by young adults at the time of initial prosecution. With the goal of reverse engineering the flow of young offenders away from a criminal conviction, the Felony Youth Diversion Program is a case resolution option for young adults age 16 to 24 charged with certain non-violent felony offenses. The Center’s Executive Director, Dr. Alice Green, is part of a panel of community members who sit on a Diversion Board, where eligible participants are offered the opportunity to take accountability for criminal wrongdoing and repair harm to any victimized party, without a felony criminal conviction or time served in State Prison. With the implementation of “Raise the Age” in October 2018, offenders aged 16 and 17 appear before a special Youth Part, and the original model continues to operate with offenders age 18 through 24.

**Albany County Zero Youth Detention Task Force**

In early 2019, Albany County Executive Dan McCoy asked Dr. Green to chair the county’s Zero Youth Detention Task Force. The task force would consist of county and community leaders, experts and advocates involved with youth justice to explore best practices in order to help shape collective efforts to reduce youth detention in Albany County. The county executive and Dr. Green recognize that youth detention is a public health, behavioral health and legal concern that touches lives across a diverse spectrum of our community. Several meetings were held during the year to address specific steps that can be taken to reduce youth detention in the county through changes in policy and creating community partnerships. Goals and objectives include:

- Eliminating racial inequity in the juvenile detention system
- Preventing youth from entering the juvenile legal system
- Diverting youth into community based options
- Supporting youth and families to reduce legal system involvement and increase healthy outcomes
- Aligning and optimizing connections between systems
Financial Information

The Center for Law and Justice is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit organization that is required to file a Form 990 annual report on its financial status. That report is a public document available for examination.

The work of the CFLJ is made possible due in large part to volunteers and private donors. In 2019, the Center contracted with the City of Albany to provide education and outreach services to community members. The City’s funding for these LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) services was provided by the federally-funded Community Development Block Grant.

Volunteer assistance is provided to CFLJ by private citizens, local attorneys, and a diverse group of student interns from colleges and universities. Many of the Center’s student interns came from Albany Medical College and the University at Albany.

During 2019, financial donations to the Center came from individuals, foundations, and community grants including:

- Albany County Legislature
- Alice Moore Foundation
- Drug Policy Alliance
- Carl Touhey Foundation
- Community Development Block Grant
- Lila Touhey
- Tides Foundation

Contact Information

Phone: (518) 427-8361
Email: cfij@verizon.net
Facebook: www.facebook.com/CFLJAlbany
Twitter: @CFLJAlbany

Mailing Address: Center for Law and Justice
Pine West Plaza Bldg. 2
Washington Avenue Ext.
Albany, NY 12202

Office Location: 220 Green Street
Albany, NY 12202
### Board and Staff Members

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