2020 has been a very challenging year for our community, and the Center for Law and Justice would like to thank all of you who have supported the Center this year. Your support makes it possible for us to continue our fight to eliminate the gap between law and justice, by creating an equitable criminal justice system which values all human life and acknowledges community members as partners in public safety. The Center seeks to achieve this goal through amplifying the voices of marginalized people and communities, while educating and empowering those same communities to demand an end to mass criminalization, mass incarceration, and systemic oppression and racism.

This year our campaign to create transformative change and address the impact of systemic racism on our justice system, public safety, police, and the Albany Community took on a new sense of importance in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, and the national and local protest.

On May 25, midway through our questioning process of local government officials and our development of a "structural racism symposium," George Floyd died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds.

The ensuing public outcry and calls for reform in cities and towns all across the nation, including Albany, amplified the importance of our dialogue. Swift action was taken in New York by city and state officials. Albany's Mayor decreed that the APD cannot use choke holds, knee-to-neck” restraints, or “hog-tying;” that an officer must intervene if he or she sees another officer using excessive force or verbally escalating a situation; and that the history of racism and implicit bias be taught to police officers. The Albany Common Council supported repealing Civil Rights Law 50-a, granting subpoena power the Community Police Review Board, and requiring all APD officers to wear body cameras. State government repealed Civil Rights Law 5-a, outlawed choke holds, and required that the State Attorney General serve as a special prosecutor in cases involving law enforcement officers. Governor Cuomo announced the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative, requiring localities to develop a plan that reinvents and modernizes policy, strategies and programs.

Against that backdrop, we designed as part of our structural racism symposium, a one-hour panel with an eye toward “setting the stage” for the development of the reimagined policing plan mandated by Governor Cuomo. After George Floyd’s murder the goal of the symposium broadened to imagine a just society free of systemic racism, where BIPOC individuals in the Capital Region truly have no reason to fear they or a loved one will lose their lives at the hand of police. The Center will continue to fight for a free and just society in 2021 and we hope you all will continue the fight with us.
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, and marked its 35th anniversary in 2020. During its existence, 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.

COVID-19 Impact

At the end of March 2020, the State of New York went in pandemic mode, with recommendations to work remotely where possible, mask mandates and social distancing guidelines. This health crisis resulted in work being done by the Center for Law & Justice and its partners to expand into remote services via phone and website. Despite these challenges, the work of the Center and its partners – Albany Medical College and Legal Aid Society - continued and were still able to accomplish a great deal, as evidenced below.

Prevention and Empowerment

The Center takes calls Monday through Friday from community members seeking help with issues such as criminal justice, legal rights, civil justice, housing, discrimination, 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 which were provided at the Center pre-pandemic, and remotely during the pandemic, including legal information and health system navigation. In 2020 the Center directly helped 215 clients through its intake and referral services. Albany Medical
College and the Legal Aid Society helped many clients through their partnerships with the Center, as explained below.

**Assistance Provided Through CFLJ Intake and Referral Services in 2020**

The Center provides a limited number of grocery gift cards to those in urgent need of food, funded by Albany Medical College. Heating assistance is provided to needy households during the winter, including help applying for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

**Legal information** is provided by an attorney who volunteers his time at the Center, and includes criminal, civil, family court, discrimination, and probate information. The Legal Aid Society also provided valuable services to the Center’s clients in 2020, as explained below.
Legal Aid Society Partnership

Legal information and representation for civil cases is provided to CFLJ clients free of charge by attorneys who volunteer their time and expertise at the Center. In addition to the pro bono counseling provided by the Center’s staff attorney, the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (LASNNY) began providing services for 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, housing, work force issues, and unemployment.

This 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, 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.

Legal services provided include both criminal and civil matters – many of which were related to family court issues, discrimination cases, student’s rights in schools, and probate information. 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.

During the 2020 reporting period, the Center worked with LASNNY in managing 29 cases related to our reentry project, and 70 cases for non-reentry related matters. Additionally, 19 other legal intakes were addressed by referrals to other external organizations that provided assistance.
This unique partnership represents a substantial benefit to the community, as it allows LASNNY to expand its client base to those who would otherwise not be eligible due to LASNNY’s standard client limitations that take income and other resources into account.

**Albany Medical College Partnership**

“Health Equity Project” services are provided to clients of the Center through a partnership with Albany Medical College. The HEP is part of the service learning curriculum at Albany Medical College and participating medical students learn about public health, health policy, and the social determinants of health through their relationships with community members.

It is widely recognized that the social determinants of health, including navigating the healthcare system and accessing care, have a significant impact on the health of individuals and communities. Since 2016, the Albany Medical College Division of Community Outreach and Medical Education has worked with clients of the Center for Law & Justice to address non-medical issues related to healthcare and the social determinants of health through the Health Equity Project.

Students from Albany Medical College and the University at Albany School of Public Health, under supervision from the Albany Medical College Office of Community Engagement, help CFLJ clients with issues such as understanding insurance benefits, finding a primary care provider, accessing food resources, understanding discharge instructions, resolving billing issues, or setting up transportation to medical appointments. Most clients have several healthcare-related needs, and many return to the CFLJ multiple times for assistance.

In 2020 the Health Equity Project held 125 meetings and phone calls with Center clients on health and related matters. Services included help with:

- Finding a health care provider
- Providing social support to clients
- Insurance enrollment and help with insurance
- Transportation to doctors and pharmacies
- Housing resources
- Food assistance
- Other services as shown in the chart below

Supplementing these major categories of activities, Albany Medical College provided essential COVID related services to Center clients in 2020 including which pharmacies could provide delivery, cataloguing testing sites and requirements, identifying providers accepting new patients, providing masks for clients, and drafting a Center reopening plan.
Capital Region Connections

The Center produces, updates and distributes this guide for residents of the Capital District and people currently or formerly detained in jail or prison. 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. It provides information on the topics listed below. Funds for printing were provided by the Albany County Legislature.

Parole  
Financial assistance  
Housing  
Food pantries  
Health care  
Finding a job  
NYS prison system  
Courts  
Sex offender regulations  

Education  
Voting  
Veterans benefits  
Senior citizen resources  
Legal resources  
Community resources  
Probation and conditional discharge
Copies of *Capital Region Connections* are available free of charge and are mailed upon request to individuals currently in prison. An electronic version can be found on the Center’s website.

**Community Education and Outreach**

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 racism. As a result, she helps to educate the community on important issues and has written and spoken on topics during 2020 that included the following:

- Raise the Age law
- Bail reform
- Protests in Albany following the murder of George Floyd
- Policy on use of force by police
- Civil Rights Law 50-a
- Time for Reckoning Symposium
- Interview with Robin D’Angelo and other anti-racists
- Response to Albany Common Council on Public Safety
- Anti-racism speech in Saratoga
- National Basketball Association panel on social justice
- Systemic racism
- Emergency eviction foreclosures

**Albany Policing Collaborative**

Following the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing public outcry and calls for reform in cities and towns all across the nation, including Albany, Governor Cuomo announced the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative. His Executive Order required localities within the state to develop a plan to reinvest and modernize police strategies and programs. Although the Center was not invited to participate in the City of Albany’s Police and Reform Collaborative, Dr. Green sent helpful packets of information to the working groups. She was also asked by the city to help evaluate proposals which the city was seeking to study racism in policing and to conduct an audit of Albany’s police department.
**The Time for Reckoning**

As a result of the Center’s work on Structural Racism and Public Safety in Albany (see below), the University at Albany Writers Institute approached Dr. Green about participating in a symposium to address these issues. She and her staff began collaborating with the Writers Institute to develop content for the symposium, which was titled “The Time for Reckoning: Confronting Systemic Racism, Seeking Justice and Reimagining Society.” The symposium was underwritten with a generous gift from the Steve McKee Foundation of Troy. Other collaborators included WMHT, the Times Union, the Justice Center of Rensselaer County, All of Us, Youth FX, Amnesty International USA, and other community partners.

“The Time for Reckoning” addresses systemic racism in the Capital Region’s justice system and throughout the country. Its overarching goal is to imagine a just society free of systemic racism, where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) truly have no reason to fear that they or a loved one will lose their lives at the hands of police. “The Time for Reckoning” achieves this by providing a multi-media, interactive and collaborative forum for the voices of local leaders and impacted community members, local elected officials, and nationally known experts.

**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. In 2020 the featured film was *When They See Us*. It is based on events of the 1989 Central Park jogger case and explores the lives and families of the five Black and Latino male suspects who were falsely accused then prosecuted on charges related to the rape and assault of a white woman in Central Park, New York City.

**Advocacy and Community Organizing**

**Structural Racism and Public Safety in Albany**

In early April 2020, the Center for Law and Justice released “Structural Racism and Public Safety in Albany,” a report that describes the responsibility shared by four Albany public officials for the shortcomings of the city’s community policing efforts. That report followed upon “Pathway to Reformative Change: Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and the Albany Community” which reported the results of a survey of over 300 city of Albany residents who responded to a CFLJ questionnaire asking their opinions and thoughts on public safety and law enforcement.

In the “Structural Racism and Public Safety in Albany” report, specific position-related questions regarding structural racism and community policing were posed to each of the following officials beginning in April and continuing through June: Mayor Kathy Sheehan, Police Chief Eric Hawkins, District Attorney David Soares, and Common Council President Corey Ellis. In keeping with its commitment to transparency, the Center posted all letters sent to the officials, as well as summaries of their responses and CFLJ commentaries.
concerning the officials’ responses. Each individual was asked to personally participate in a “Recommitment to Community Policing” Symposium to be hosted by the Center in the fall.

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 Working 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 to 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 is a nationwide program that 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.

Albany County Zero Youth Detention Task Force
In 2019, Albany County Executive Dan McCoy asked Dr. Green to chair the county’s Zero Youth Detention Task Force. The task force consists 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. 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

Meetings and progress were delayed in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 and staffing changes at Albany County. Dr. Green did, however, assign task force members to working groups focusing on specific areas including Public Health Concerns, Community Service and Education, the existing Juvenile Detention System, and Racial and Ethnic Disparities.
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. Volunteer assistance is provided by private citizens, local attorneys, and a diverse group of student interns from colleges and universities. Many of the Center's student interns come from Albany Medical College and the University at Albany School of Public Health.

During 2020, financial donations to the Center came from individuals, foundations, and companies including:

- Albany County Legislature
- Lila Touhey
- Alice Moore Foundation
- Price Chopper
- Capital District Physicians Health Plan
- Steve McKee Foundation
- Carl Touhey Foundation
- Tides Foundation

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