A Scheduling Change to Accommodate the Mayor’s Request

This week, the Center was scheduled to send comprehensive questionnaires regarding systemic racism in Albany to the Mayor, the Police Chief, the District Attorney, and the President of the Common Council. The original plan in preparing for the fall “Recommitment to Community Policing” symposium was to have question-and-answer sessions with government officials on a bi-weekly basis throughout the summer, with each Q&A session building on the previous one. However, to accommodate the Mayor’s schedule during the pandemic and Albany’s “re-opening” period, the Center had modified its process at the request of the Mayor. (Please see CFLJ’s Third Commentary for a full description of the modified process). Under the new process, all government officials were to be sent comprehensive questionnaires during the week of June 1st, with a return date of July 1st. The letters were to be posted on CFLJ’s website during the week of June 1st, and officials’ responses were to be posted during the week of July 6th.

However, comments made by government officials at their May 31st morning press conference regarding Albany’s peaceful afternoon protest of the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd, and the vandalism and violence that followed in the evening, have impressed upon the Center the need to be as thorough as possible in this last round of questionnaires. The officials said that they breathed a sigh of relief as the peaceful protest concluded in the afternoon, and that they were not expecting a riot in the evening.

Frankly, the Center finds city government’s lack of anticipation of the possibility of vandalism and violence astonishing. In August 2019, CFLJ released “Pathway to Reformative Change: Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and the Albany Community.” The report presented shocking survey findings regarding the level of mistrust communities of color expressed for the Albany Police Department and the District Attorney’s Office. That report was embraced by community members and all but ignored by government officials. For nearly a year, the Center has been advising government officials that minority despondency over the APD shooting of Ellazar Williams and other police abuses has reached explosive proportions. Both the peaceful protest of Saturday afternoon and the violence of Saturday evening were borne of Albany Blacks’ wretched fears that a loved one will meet the fate of George Floyd at the hands of the Albany Police Department.

The comments expressed by some government officials this weekend have convinced the Center that its questions have to include, for example, such basics as the concept of “community.” Chief Hawkins participated in a radio commentary that aired on WAMC on May 29, 2020 (the day before Albany’s Saturday protests) on the topic of the Minneapolis protests and how they relate to Albany. In that interview the Chief expressed confidence that the APD’s good relationship with the community would carry the city past the unrest gripping cities all across the nation. The August 2019 CFLJ Community Survey indicates that only 11% of Blacks believe the APD develops positive relationships with ALL community members; only 11% believe that the APD treats ALL people with respect; only 15% believe the APD is trustworthy; and only 18% believe the APD effectively practices community policing. Many in Albany would like to know on what data the Chief bases his conclusion that the APD has a good relationship with the community.

Under the new schedule, the comprehensive questionnaires will be distributed during the week of June 15th, with responses due a full month later. The questionnaires will be posted on CFLJ’s website during the week of June 15th, and the government officials’ responses will be posted during the week of July 13th.
The Center will continue to post its Friday commentaries on topics relevant to systemic racism in Albany’s public safety system. This Friday’s topic: “The Last Half Century of Systemic Racism in Albany.”