The Center for Law and Justice envisions a peaceful, just, and compassionate community that provides each resident with equal access to the goods, services, and opportunities of that community. It also seeks the fair and just treatment of all people throughout the civil and criminal justice systems, and works to reduce reliance upon incarceration.

The Center’s emblem features the words of Frederick Douglas: “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” It is these words that our organization seeks to emulate in the work we do. Historically, the poor and racial and ethnic minority groups have been harmed by discriminatory treatment and a structural system that denies them equal access to resources. The Center for Law and Justice demands systemic change through education, advocacy, and legislation. We seek to ensure that every community receives equal goods and services regardless of minority status.
As you review our 2014 Annual Report, you will notice that the Center remained active and deeply involved with many of the most pressing civil and human rights issues that affect the Capital District Region. Much time was devoted to our campaign to encourage the Governor of the State of New York to engage our state in a thorough review of criminal justice policy, particularly mass incarceration. We believe that such a review would promote a deeper understanding of the impact of the criminal justice system on our poor communities and those of color. That understanding could generate a serious movement towards systemic change in our criminal justice system that we believe harms and unnecessarily controls the lives of far too many people.

We were able to plant the seed and give support for developing a new approach for dealing with drug abuse. Our collaboration with the Drug Policy Alliance of New York, the Albany Police Department, other major law enforcement agencies, government bodies, and health and social service providers has led us in the direction of treating drug use as a health issue.

Alice P. Green

Alice P. Green
Executive Director,
Center for Law and Justice
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In 2014 the Center received requests for legal and non-legal assistance from individuals and organizations throughout the Capital Region. We received over 500 client visitations for information and guidance provided by our legal advisor, Jessica Gorman and our program manager, Darryl Johnson.

Jessica Gorman met with 120 clients last year and provided the following services:

- Legal Case Guidance
- Attorney Referrals
- Filing a Complaint Against the Police Guidance
- Family Law Information
- Employment Law Information
- Criminal Law Information
- Civil Law Information
- Rent & Housing Law Information
- General Legal Rights Information

Darryl Johnson met with over 400 clients last year and provided the following services:

- Reentry Guidance
- Employment Referrals
- Housing Referrals
- Crisis Intervention
- Health Services Referrals
- Social Services Referrals
In 2014 the CFLJ received mail correspondence from over 440 inmates incarcerated in local and statewide jails and prisons and families of incarcerated/formerly incarcerated individuals. Staff provided information and guidance for requests in the following areas:

- Education upon release
- Employment upon release
- Social Services upon release
- Housing upon release
- Legal Information specific to client’s case
- Medical care while incarcerated
- Legal rights while incarcerated

We also received 259 requests for our “On Your Own” publication by mail from inmates and 236 requests from staff at local and statewide jails, prisons, and organizations.

“On Your Own” provides information and resources for persons formerly incarcerated, the convicted, and their families in the Capital District. In 2014, we updated and expanded “On Your Own” and began distributing the eleventh edition of this publication. Supported by grants from The Rotary Club of Albany, New York, The TIDES Foundation, Lila L. Touhey.

The first section of this guide defines the legal rights for persons with a criminal conviction and the first steps an individual will need to take when reentering their community. Topics include: obtaining government documents such as birth certificates and social security cards, finding a job, and obtaining housing. The second section is a directory of contact addresses for local agencies that offer assistance through the transition process. All services listed are offered free of charge or at a modest cost.

Although primarily designed for individuals returning to our community following incarceration, our resource guide has proven useful to the families of incarcerated persons and other organizations.

An electronic copy of “On Your Own” is available on our website: http://www.cflj.org/resources-and-publications/. Electronic access has allowed greater access to those individuals who live beyond the Capital Region. Our settings allow for this publication to be downloaded and printed, which has proven to be a cost-effective way for countless ally organizations to access the information we have collected and distribute it to their clients and constituents.
The Commission would be charged to carry out 3 important actions:
(1) **Assess** the social, economic, and political impact the War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration has and continues to have on New Yorkers, particularly the poor and people of color.
(2) **Allow** people in our communities to tell their stories about the impact of these policies on their lives and those of their families and communities.
(3) **Find** bold systemic recommendations and actions to halt and end the use of mass incarceration.

In 2012 the Center for Law and Justice released three reports, which describe the overrepresentation of minorities in the capital district’s adult and juvenile justice systems including the racial impact of drug sweeps performed by local and federal authorities from 2006 to 2012. Collectively, the three reports document the need for a “Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission” charged with examining and addressing the impact of mass incarceration in New York State. In 2013 we started a petition to the Governor of New York State to appoint this commission.

After more than a year of gathering signatures, on May 20, 2014, the Center for Law and Justice delivered 10,000 signed petitions to Gov. Cuomo asking him to establish a Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission.

“We’re here because a crisis exists in New York state that few people are recognizing”
  – Alice Green, State Capitol, May 20, 2014.
NEW YORK AGAINST PRISON INJUSTICE
MARCH AND RALLY

On May 5, 2014 the Center for Law and Justice joined The Social Justice Center, Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration among other local and statewide activist groups and hundreds of supporters at the New York State Capitol for a rally for justice system reform. Supporters called for an end to solitary confinement, parole reform, releasing elderly incarcerated populations, eliminating reentry discrimination, public defense overhaul and establishing a “Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission.” The event featured a speech from Dr. Alice P. Green, Executive Director of the CFLJ and a keynote speech delivered by activist and author Cornell West.

TRUTH, JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION
SPEAKOUT

On November 1, 2014 the CFLJ partnered with local activist group, Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, Citizen Action of New York, Friends for Racial Justice, Organization for a Free Society to sponsor an event at the Albany Public Library where the public was encouraged to join an open dialogue and share their own experiences of being incarcerated, or their family member or friend’s experience with the criminal justice system, as well as individual and community concerns about the impact of incarceration, and to suggest solutions for safer communities and justice system reforms. The event was based on the model of “Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation.” Here, truth represented the individual and collective testimony, justice represented individual and collective solutions, and reconciliation represented the impact for the common good.
The Center for Law and Justice (CFLJ) facilitated two legal rights workshop programs this year: a winter and summer session. The winter 2014 session, which spanned from January until March, consisted of six, hour and a half long sessions. The program served 131 youth participants, ages 14 through 16, at four locations. The CFLJ partnered with Equinox, the Albany Public Library – Howe Branch, and the Black and Latino Achievers Program of the Capital Area YMCA. The workshops were led by Officer Tucker of the Albany Police Department and Jessica Gorman, legal director of the CFLJ. The lesson aimed to teach youth their legal rights and responsibilities when interacting with police on the street, in cars, at home, and in schools. Participants were asked to respond to questions and perform skits to demonstrate key concepts including Miranda Rights, police stop protocol, search and seizure protocol.

The summer 2014 session was a five-week program that consisted of ten, hour and a half workshops. The program served 93 youth participants, ages 12 through 21, at four locations. The CFLJ partnered with Equinox, Albany Housing Authority, Urban Arts Experience Teen Internship Program, and KIDS Green House. The workshops were divided into two-day sessions. The focus of the first day was to teach participants their legal rights and responsibilities when interacting with police officers. The format of day one was as follows: 5-10 minute introduction, 10-15 minute skits performed by Urban Arts Experience, 55-60 minute lesson, and 5-10 minute wrap-up. The purpose of the introductions was to provide a brief outline the program and its intentions to the group. For the summer session the CFLJ partnered with a student group lead by Urban Arts Experience who performed skits of fictional interactions with police officers to demonstrate how the individual’s response to an officer can create a positive or negative counter-response from the officer. The lesson was led by Officer Tucker and Jessica Gorman and developed directly from the skits that were performed. They used evidence from the skits to support their discussion on maintaining safety when interacting with officers. The final portion of the workshop allowed for participant questions. The focus of day 2 was to discuss the youth’s individual responsibilities as citizens within their community. The format of day two was as follows: 10-15 introductions, 10-15 minute skits, 50-60 minute dialogue, and 5-10 minute wrap-up. The purpose of the introductions on the day 2 was to establish a comfortable setting for open dialogue. Participants were asked to share who they are, their hobbies, and future goals with the group. Following introductions, the student group led by Urban Arts Experience performed 3-5 skits. Officer Tucker used the themes demonstrated in the skits to open a dialogue with the group about civic responsibilities.
The book *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander was published in 2010. In this book, Alexander describes how mass incarceration today serves the same purpose as segregation laws did in the Jim Crow era South. Today, there are more African Americans under the Criminal Justice System—in prison or jails, on parole or probation than were enslaved in 1850. Discrimination in housing, education, employment, and voting rights are now legitimized and enforced against ex-offenders. Alexander’s book has sparked a movement. The New Jim Crow movement seeks to end the structural racism that has provoked as well as resulted from the mass incarceration of African Americans.

In 2012, the Center for Law and Justice created a local chapter of the Campaign to End the New Jim Crow. The group formed to encourage community discussion based around the topics presented in Michelle Alexander’s book. In 2014, the group met every second Monday of each month with a core membership of eleven individuals. Besides creating a space in which community dialogue was possible, the Albany Campaign to End New Jim Crow Group has been active with other groups around New York State in order to draw public attention to the issue the overrepresentation of minorities in the American Justice System.

In 2014 the New Jim Crow group were instrumental in campaigning for the petition to establish a “Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission.” Members were active in collecting signatures, delivering the signatures to the Governor’s office, and organizing for community events including the May 5th rally and November 1st speak-out.
If you believe mass incarceration is a form of enslavement, you can't reform it. You don't reform slavery. You abolish it.

— Alice Green, July 4, 2014

On July 4, 2014 Executive Director of the Center for Law and Justice gave Underground Railroad History Project's July 4th Oration in the backyard of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence on Livingston Avenue. Her speech addressed the overrepresentation of people of color in the American Justice system.

"We have to be able to tell our young people how to protect themselves from harm and figure out how to work to change the whole system"

— Dr. Alice Green, December 3, 2014

Following the grand jury verdicts in Ferguson and New York City, the Center for Law and Justice participated in community forums with local law enforcement in Albany and Troy. During a forum on December 3, 2014 at the Arbor Hill Center, community members addressed their distrust with law enforcement. Members of the Albany Police Department, Mayor Sheenan, and Dr. Alice Green were present at this event.
As we look to 2015, our 30th year of operation, new doors of opportunity will open for us to collaborate even more to bring about that systemic change. One major area of focus will be on community health and welfare, looking particularly at the intersection of race, crime, criminal justice policy, and health. Seattle’s Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program or L.E.A.D. will serve as a model to pursue the establishment of such program in Albany.

Our new project, the Community Health, Education, and Diversion Program (H.E.A.D), has already been established and is ready to move ahead to support a LEAD-type program in Albany. We plan to work closely with a number of other community groups and organizations such as the Albany Medical College to improve the health of people re-entering our community from jails and prisons and others in need of medical care and prevention services.

We look to expand our legal rights program to provide more workshops for youths and introduce ones for their parents and guardians. The same will be true of “On Your Own.” Its name will be changed to “Upstate Connections” and contain additional legal and health and human service information for our low income communities and persons returning to the area from incarceration.

It promises to be a great year as we continue to depend upon community support and the help of student interns and volunteers.