The Center for Law and Justice strongly urges all Common Council members to vote for passage of Local Law L, which provides for the creation of the Albany Public Safety Commission. This proposed restructuring of public safety services in Albany simply makes more sense than the status quo. All across the country, cities are re-imagining their policing systems.

When Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 203, he challenged all New Yorkers to “reinvent” policing in our municipalities. Dedicated citizens on the Albany Police Reform Collaborative provided our city with a solid foundation on which to construct our reinvented public safety system. Creating an entirely new service delivery system, Local Law L decouples community safety from policing because not all calls to the APD warrant an armed response.

The APSC is to be a bifurcated, community-supervised body consisting of two distinct and co-equal branches: “Law Enforcement,” and “Community Safety and Oversight.” Responsibilities that currently rest solely within the Albany Police Department are to be distributed across these two co-equal branches, with the Law Enforcement branch carrying out traffic control and penal code violation responses. The Community Safety and Oversight branch will respond to non-law-enforcement calls for service --- for example, mental health issues --- as well as oversee APSC policy development, implementation, and enforcement.

Further delineation of the two branches is to take place after community members --- particularly those in neighborhoods most heavily impacted by APD interactions --- have had a chance to offer recommendations. Social justice advocacy groups, including the Center for Law and Justice, have begun conducting community education and input sessions to help flesh out the complete structure of the APSC. Additionally, community members are helping to finalize the APSC’s draft vision statement, which emphasizes decoupling public safety from policing, centering community voices, and ending systemic racism.

Integral to the proposed vision statement are four pillars of procedural justice: treating people with dignity and respect; giving citizens a voice during encounters; being open and transparent in decision-making; and conveying trustworthy motives. A guiding principle of the APSC is Sanctity of Life: that at the core of a responder’s responsibilities is the duty to protect all human life and physical safety.

Community response to the proposed APSC has already been overwhelmingly positive from engagements conducted in the South End, in West Hill, in Arbor Hill, and most recently just two days ago at Albany’s Juneteenth celebration. Residents appreciate that the Albany Public Safety Commission will function entirely differently than the current Albany Police Department, and that Local Law L actually “reinvents” policing in Albany.

The Center for Law and Justice urges all Common Council members to support Local Law L.