The Center for Law and Justice sincerely appreciates the many hours of volunteer service dedicated to the production of recommendations related to accountability and transparency in transforming policing in the City of Albany. The Center supports all of the Civilian Oversight working group’s recommendations.

The Center particularly appreciates those goals and strategies that strengthen the ongoing structure of citizen oversight, including the Community Police Review Board (CPRB) and the Albany Community Policing Advisory Board (ACPAC). Governor Cuomo’s Executive Order 203 calls for transformative change in policing. EO 203 mandates that the Police Reform Collaborative “perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployment, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices,” and that the ultimate product of the Collaborative process must be “a plan to improve such deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.”

The Civilian Oversight working group’s goals and strategies pertaining to a strengthened citizen oversight infrastructure are compatible with the Police Department Functions working group’s recommendation that a “Civilian Public Safety Commission” be established. The Center suggests that the final plan submitted for consideration by the Collaborative to the Common Council – complete with goals, strategies, implementation dates, resources, and an overall budget -- would best reflect transformative change by recommending the establishment of a bifurcated City of Albany “Department of Public Safety” to replace the Albany Police Department. This Department should house two equal-status components, the “Division of Law Enforcement” (performing the law enforcement functions currently provided by the Albany Police Department) and the “Division of Citizen Safety and Oversight.”

The Division of Citizen Safety and Oversight would oversee the non-law-enforcement functions currently provided by the APD (e.g., calls that require a social work response); diversion programs; and citizen oversight efforts, including the Community Police Review Board. The Center believes the following recommendations of the Civilian Oversight working group fall within the purview of the Division of Citizen Safety and Oversight:

- Give the review board sufficient powers to earn community trust (Goal 3);
- Ensure that civil litigation promotes community trust and better policing (Goal 4);
- Create Special Prosecutor’s Board (Goal 5);
- Collect enough information to meaningfully assess police conduct (Goal 6);
- Publicize information that will create confidence and trust (Goal 7); and
- Improve public outreach and strengthen ACPAC (Goal 8).

Once again, the Center expresses its appreciation to all of the volunteers who so generously contributed their time and effort in the production of these recommendations. We look forward to seeing the final plan --- complete with goals, strategies, implementation dates, resources, and a proposed tentative budget --- that the Collaborative submits to the Common Council.