**Report hits drug sweeps of black youths**

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ALBANY — Four drug sweeps that targeted Albany neighborhoods in the last six years unfairly sent young black men to prison for a third of their lives, according to the latest report from the Center for Law and Justice, Inc.

At a Tuesday morning news conference, Center Executive Director Alice Green presented findings from the report, titled “What Have We Done? Mass Incarceration and the Targeting of Albany’s Black Males by Federal, State and Local Authorities.” The center’s third and final report of the year asserts that structural racism was inherent in the Albany sweeps of 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2012.

Members of the city’s young black community have been sentenced to more than 600 years in prison for non-violent offenses as a result of these sweeps, according to the report.

“In essence, many of Albany’s black males were sentenced to serve a third of their young lives behind bars for merely having associated in one way or another — either through a phone call, by enjoying similar music, by attending the same social function, or through some other seemingly innocuous connection — with those suspected of criminal activity,” the report says.

The four drug sweeps targeted Albany street gangs known as the Jungle Junkies, the Original Gangsta Killas and the Bloods. The report contends that officials relied on prior felony conviction to weakly link defendants to alleged racketeering conspiracy.

The 2006 sweep targeted gang activity in the city’s Arbor Hill and West Hill neighborhoods. Of the 30 alleged gang members that were charged, 27 were black. Sixteen of them, none of whom was older than 21 at the time, pleaded guilty to a single charge of Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations conspiracy.

A second RICO sweep was conducted the city’s South End in 2009, with 25 members and associates of the OGKs charged. Next were the Bloods, 41 of whom were charged by state officials after a months-long investigation involving surveillance and wiretaps. The most recent raid was in March of this year, and resulted in 52 alleged gang members being charged.

The Center for Law and Justice closed out its report by calling on Gov. Andrew Cuomo to appoint a task force charged with assessing and addressing the impact of mass incarceration on the state’s minority communities. Community organizations will discuss the topic further at a forum to be held at the Unitarian Universalist Society in Albany at 6 p.m. Oct. 25.