Letters to the Editor for March 6
Tuesday, March 6, 2012

Sch’dy law enforcement’s cool reaction to report on racial justice worrisome

The Center for Law and Justice is hopeful that government officials will be more receptive to our report, “The Disproportionate Impact of the Criminal Justice System on People of Color in the Capital Region,” after reviewing it in its entirety. District Attorney Robert Carney has said the findings of the report “are no proof of racism,” and that the report “doesn’t deal constructively with the problem.”

The report is not an attempt to “prove racism.” It is an explanation of the manner in which seemingly race-neutral laws and policies often have racially disparate effects. The federal “war on drugs” and the Rockefeller drug laws play key roles in the disproportionate representation of minorities in prison.

This report is intended to be the catalyst for community discussions, and we took great pains to avoid allocating blame to any current administration or agency. Like Mr. Carney, we believe this is a societal problem that transcends criminal justice — hence, our call for the involvement of government agencies, the community, and academic institutions.

The district attorney’s and police department’s comments are not conducive to initiating a community dialogue to address this problem. Lt. Mark McCracken’s statement (“The Schenectady police department combats crime through intelligence-based policing, focusing on current crime trends and locations for enforcement action in order to make Schenectady a safer place to live, work and visit”) reflects few of the tenets of the community policing philosophy embraced by the Albany and Troy police departments, both of whom attempt to engage the community in a partnership to implement effective problem-solving techniques.

To learn more about the cities’ approaches to policing, we had sent an e-mail to the three chiefs explaining the purpose of the report and asking them about their community policing efforts. E-mail, phone and faxed messages to the Schenectady police chief on five separate occasions in December and January went unanswered. Although the report contains information regarding Albany’s and Troy’s community policing efforts, we could say little about Schenectady’s.

We sincerely hope that Schenectady’s officials will be more receptive to the report’s recommendations. Otherwise, it is likely that the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on people of color in Schenectady will go unaddressed until the community demands it. The report can be found at http://www.cflj.org/report-2/.

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