

College-Community Partnership for Criminal Justice Reform

Racial Equity and Criminal Justice Reform Proposal

We are a consortium of faculty from MVCC, Utica College, SUNY Poly, Herkimer College, and Hamilton College who have joined with others active in local public affairs and social reform.

We propose a multi-step approach toward the goals of (1) identifying problems of institutional racism in local criminal justice institutions, (2) seeking solutions based on national research and local input, proposed solutions, and (3) empowering our community to continue to build mutual trust among law enforcement and criminal justice institutions and all segments of the community.

1. Building the Agenda. (August and September 2020)

We will begin by conducting community-based discussions on the criminal justice system in Oneida County, by researching national and local issues of institutional racism in our criminal justice institutions, and by surveying best-practices for ensuring inclusive, accountable law enforcement and criminal justice locally. This effort will include:

- forming a Coordinating Committee and opening substantial discussions with other groups in Oneida County on the nature of the problem and reform proposals;
- determining the list of communities and agencies we will engage for their experience and assessment of current problems in the criminal justice system;
- offering a joint course at Utica and Hamilton Colleges to 1) collect and analyze public and official experience and attitudes on local criminal justice and 2) propose specific reforms as well as demonstration projects, through:
 - interviews with criminal justice administrators
 - a multiphase, stratified survey of public opinion and experience
 - focus groups

- canvassing of church groups, service organizations, neighborhood groups and other community organizations
 - presenting series of lectures and discussions parallel to the joint course, which would be available to the community on-line and by public access broadcasting.
- 2. Assessing Community and Official Experience and Attitudes. (October - November)

Members of the Coordinating Committee and students in the joint UC-Hamilton course will be engaged in interviewing individuals and hosting small group meetings throughout the communities and institutions to be studied. As we go, answers will be compared and questions and topics will be refined to obtain a clear picture of both public and official evaluation of the criminal justice system. These discussions, in addition to a professionally conducted poll on these issues, are opportunities for broad, substantive input into the development of reform recommendations.

- 3. Initial Recommendations. (November, December)

Governor Cuomo's June 12, 2020, Executive Order (203), requires a plan of action for law enforcement reform by April 1, 2021. We will prepare a list of recommendations to present to the political subdivisions in Oneida County by January 1, 2020. However, as this is a large undertaking of a historic nature, this will not be the end of the reform process. Law enforcement is part of a criminal justice system. Reform should encompass, as well, prosecution, court proceedings, probation, public defense, and corrections.

- 4. Community Reaction and Consensus-Building. (January-February)

We will co-host with community groups and local governments a series of public meetings to review what we have found and what we recommend, in light of the national research and evidence-based best practices. These meetings will be advertised and conducted to maximize input from the public, so that we can revise our recommendations accordingly.

- 5. Community Empowerment. (Feb-March)

The process described here is shaped by the Governor's April 1, 2021, law enforcement agency reform deadline. This is perhaps the kind of push needed to get us past talk on

these issues. There will undoubtedly be a great deal more to discuss and act upon beyond the deadline. This process, it should be clear, is not defined by or confined to criticism of the police. The police are part of several political and social systems that include the other institutions mentioned above, as well as the local police training academy, the law enforcement budgets of each entity, law enforcement and corrections labor unions, as well as the neighborhoods and families that thrive or decline according to the quality of local justice.

There is a great deal of work to be done. The job of the working group is to establish cooperation between colleges, community groups, and local governments to deal with our immediate work, but, more importantly, to sustain public engagement with reform efforts in years to come.

Coordinating Committee of College-Community Partnership for Criminal Justice Reform

Committee members:

- **Inesha Briggs**, Operations Coordinator, Community Foundation of Oneida and Herkimer Counties
- **Tony Colón**, Chair, MVCC Board of Trustees; Chair, Utica City Committee on Access and Inclusion; Mohawk Valley Latino Association
- **Bernard Hyman**, Professor of Practice, Fraud and Financial Crime Investigation and Executive Director, Economic Crime and Cybersecurity Institute, Utica College
- **Gbemende Johnson**, Associate Professor of Government, Hamilton College
- **Marquis Palmer**, Office of the Brooklyn Public Defender
- **Mark Polkosnik**, Professor of Legal Studies, Herkimer College
- **Jawwaad Rasheed**, Magistrate, Oneida County Family Court Magistrate; President, Frontiers Club of the Mohawk Valley
- **Christopher Riddle**, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Utica College
- **Veronica Tichenor**, Professor of Sociology; Coordinator, Community and Behavioral Health Program, SUNY Polytechnic Institute
- **Frank Anechiarico**, Maynard-Knox Professor of Government and Law, Hamilton College, Convener fanechia@hamilton.edu cell: 202-641-4489