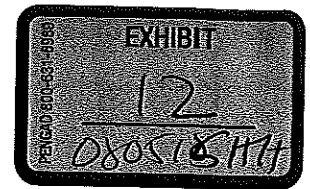


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Repeal Rockefeller Drug Laws

Thank you for taking the time to listen to us on this important issue.

Although there are several reforms that I would like to see implemented in the criminal justice system, one of the first I would attack are the harsh Rockefeller drug laws. As a Hispanic woman who grew up in one of New York City's worst ghettos, I recall the constant stream of drug dealers in my neighborhood. Although breaking the law, most of these folks were non-violent users who sought their escape from reality in a cellophane bag. In 1973, when Governor Rockefeller signed into law the Rockefeller drug laws it more than tripled the prison population. Furthermore, most of those receiving the harsh sentences are not the drug bosses who generally are careful not to come into contact with the poison they distribute. Lastly, these laws solidify the baked in racism which is already present in our criminal justice system. For instance, in New York State, the majority of people who use and sell drugs are white, yet 92% of drug offenders in prison here are either African American or Latino.

It costs more than \$36,000 a year to keep an inmate in the state prison system; yet methods such as rehabilitation centers cost between \$17 and \$21,000 yearly. Furthermore, according to a 2006 ACLU report, African Americans make up 15 percent of drug users, but account for 37 percent of those arrested on drug charges, 59 percent of those convicted, and 74 percent of all drug offenders sentenced to prison. Public opinion should also count for what a society sees as just laws.. According to Gabriel Sayegh, a project director at the Drug Policy Alliance in New York City, "Recent polls show that nearly 80 percent of New Yorkers believe the Rockefeller Drug Laws should be

repealed." I couldn't find a poll done in Rochester, but I know an older African American gentleman in my neighborhood who did 15 years in prison under the Rockefeller Drug Laws. He is a sweet, yet broken man. I believe that he would have been better served in our community through rehabilitation.

Let me make it clear that I do not condone the use or sale of drugs. I know firsthand the harmful effects of drugs and the destruction it causes. However, I believe that more education, not prisons is the answer. I believe that we need to treat the symptoms that encourage the sale and use of drugs. For instance, let's combat poverty, provide a living wage for workers, institute universal health care, and educate our children in a manner that will enable them to compete in today's world. Many people will argue that you must curb the supply of drugs. I believe that is the essence of the War on drugs. Instead, I think you must work on the demand at the same time. It is unfortunate, but most of our society has come into contact with drugs in one form or another. It is unjust to give such harsh mandatory sentences without even considering the person or the circumstances. Finally, any law that has such negative consequences on just one segment of our population needs to be eradicated. Thank you.