



Citizens for a Safe and Fair Cleveland

Study Shows African Americans More Likely to be Charged with Drug Felonies Citizens, Community Leaders Combat Selective Enforcement

CLEVELAND- Today, Citizens for a Safe and Fair Cleveland (CSFC) released a new report documenting disparities between whites and African Americans in Cuyahoga County charged with drug related crimes. The report shows that although whites and blacks use drugs at similar rates, African Americans are far more likely to be convicted of drug felonies.

CSFC Chair James Hardiman said, “People in the city of Cleveland are routinely convicted of felonies while those in the suburbs are given misdemeanors for similar crimes. Since there are far more African Americans in the city, a disproportionate amount of them are given felony convictions.”

“This disparity has ravaged the African American community. Families are unable to make decent wages because felony convictions prevent them from attaining certain jobs. People who have a drug dependency problem are simply dumped into the local prison with little or no rehabilitation and often relapse into drug use,” continued Hardiman.

A large number of the felony prosecutions resulted from drug paraphernalia with residue being found on the accused. Most local municipal codes are in line with the intent of the state code—which is that drug paraphernalia offenses are all misdemeanors, not felonies. However, enforcement policies differ greatly between municipalities, resulting in significantly higher felony convictions for paraphernalia.

Citizens for a Safe and Fair Cleveland is a coalition committed to making the streets of Cleveland safer for all persons, while monitoring law enforcement policies to insure consistency, proportionality, and fairness. Organizations that are members of CSFC include the ACLU of Ohio, NAACP Cleveland, 100 Black Men and Cleveland Job Corps Academy, as well as a number of community leaders and stakeholders.

Hardiman concluded, “Of course those who break the law should be held responsible, but the system must be fair and sensible. We look forward to continue to work with city and county officials towards finding a resolution that will be equal to all and keep our streets safe.”

The report was authored by Professor Mona Lynch from the Department of Justice Studies at San Jose State University. Copies of the report can be found at www.safefaircleveland.org.

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