



Citizens for a Safe and Fair Cleveland

Mayor's Plan to Equalize Drug Charges First Step in Bringing Fairness to Justice System Increased Funding for Rehabilitation Still Needed

CLEVELAND- Citizens for a Safe and Fair Cleveland (CSFC) acknowledged Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson's plan to treat all drug crimes equally as an important first step towards ensuring that all people are given fair treatment in the court system. Mayor Jackson announced late Monday evening that the city would no longer charge those caught with drug residue on paraphernalia with felonies. Although the city of Cleveland routinely charged these individuals with felonies, surrounding suburbs charged those apprehended on similar offenses with misdemeanors.

CSFC Chair James Hardiman said, "Mayor Jackson's announcement recognizes what experts have been saying for years—people suffering from drug addiction need rehabilitation. Under the old system in Cleveland, thousands of people were set up to fail by being sentenced to years behind bars, receiving little to no treatment and having a felony conviction preventing them from getting certain jobs and fully integrating into our communities."

"Ohioans have invested millions of dollars in incarcerating those who are convicted of drug offenses, yet this has proven ineffective at curtailing violence and crime. It is time for our officials to invest in what works like rehabilitation, support and re-entry programs that help people break drug addictions and reintegrate into society. Continuing to needlessly pump money into incarceration without rehabilitation only means that Cleveland will continue the cycle of drug use," said ACLU of Ohio Executive Director Christine Link.

In August 2008, CFSC released a report by Professor Mona Lynch from the Department of Justice Studies at San Jose State University. The report found that African Americans who lived in the city of Cleveland faced a much higher probability of being charged with a felony drug conviction than whites who live in surrounding suburbs who commit similar offenses.

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.

"After years of operating under a broken justice system, it promises to be a long journey towards true reform and equality in our courts. African Americans still face tremendous disparities in the court system outside of those addressed by Mayor Jackson's new plan. These must be addressed and rehabilitation and other programs that aid those struggling with drug addiction must be expanded," continued Hardiman.

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