

Drug Policy Alliance

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Rockefeller Drug Law Reform Advocates to Throw a Surprise Birthday Party on Friday at Noon for Gov. Eliot Spitzer

Real Reform New York Coalition and Others to Deliver Birthday Cake and Card to Spitzer Asking Him to Keep His Campaign Promise to Reform Draconian Drug Laws

New York, NY—Today, the Real Reform New York Coalition joined with many others to throw a surprise birthday party for Gov. Eliot Spitzer outside of his New York City office. Asking him to heed his campaign promise to reform the draconian Rockefeller drug laws, the coalition celebrated Spitzer's promise of justice.

The Real Reform New York Coalition, made up of advocates, people formerly incarcerated under the Rockefeller drug laws, their family members and supporters, shared cake and party favors with the crowd, and delivered a large birthday card—signed by New York voters—demanding real reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

While campaigning, Spitzer promised to make Rockefeller Drug Law reform a priority during his term as governor. However, during the first six months in office, he has remained strangely silent about reforming Rockefeller Drug Laws.

The Rockefeller drug laws underwent minor changes in 2004 and 2005. These changes proved to be ineffective in changing the racist and non-rehabilitative impact of these laws. The Rockefeller drug laws have filled New York's state prisons with more than 14,000 people convicted of drug offenses, representing nearly 38 percent of the prison population and costing New Yorkers more than \$550 million annually.

“The last small reform to the Rockefeller Drug Laws was clearly not enough. My son Ashley is a prime example of this, because he is serving a 7 to 21 year sentence for a first time, nonviolent offense,” said Cheri O’Donoghue. “Senator Bruno, Speaker Silver, and Governor Spitzer have all promised real reform. The Assembly is acting—where is the Senate and the Governor? These inhumane, racist laws have been around for nearly 34 years, and enough is enough.”

New York's Drug Law Reform Act of 2004 (DLRA) lowered some drug sentences but it fell far short of allowing most people serving under the more punitive sentences to apply for shorter terms. The reforms also did not increase the power of judges to place addicts into treatment programs. While advocates and family members are encouraged by the modest reforms, they maintain that the recent reforms have no impact on the majority of

people behind bars. Most people behind bars on Rockefeller drug law violations are charged with nonviolent lower-level or class-B felonies.

“Given the extraordinary racism associated with these laws, it’s unbelievable they’ve been around for 34 years,” said Gabriel Sayegh, project director at Drug Policy Alliance. “Using the criminal justice system to address drug addiction is like using a nuclear bomb to fix your plumbing. The Rockefeller Drug Laws are wasteful, ineffective, racist and unjust. They’ve got to go.”

In April, the state Assembly passed A.6663, a bill that would significantly reform the Rockefeller Drug Laws by expanding treatment, reducing harsh sentences for low-level offenses, and increasing judicial discretion. Governor Spitzer has yet to comment on the bill, which is now sitting in the Senate.

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