

**AALDEF ◇ Center for Constitutional Rights ◇ Citizens Union ◇ Common Cause NY ◇  
Community Voices Heard ◇ Hispanic Federation ◇ Latino Justice PRLDEF ◇  
NAACP NYS Conference ◇ New York Civil Liberties Union ◇ New York Immigration Coalition  
VOCAL-NY ◇ Women’s City Club of New York**

**For immediate release**  
December 10, 2014

Contacts: Susan Lerner, Common Cause/NY (212) 691-6421  
Juan Cartagena, LatinoJustice (212) 219-3360  
Donna Lieberman, NYCLU (212) 607-3300  
Dick Dadey, Citizens Union (212) 227-0342  
Jacqueline Ebanks, Women’s City Club (212) 353-8070

**Call for Open Public Hearings to Restore Confidence After Garner Decision**  
*Groups Demand Transparency and Accountability in Criminal Justice Reform Deliberations*

Today, civil rights, civil liberties and good government groups sent a letter to Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders in Albany calling for open public hearings and a transparent and participatory legislative process following the failure of a Staten Island grand jury to indict the police officer whose chokehold resulted in the death of Eric Garner.

The signatories to the letter are the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), Center for Constitutional Rights, Citizens Union, Common Cause NY, Community Voices Heard, Hispanic Federation, Latino Justice PRLDEF, NAACP New York State Conference, New York Civil Liberties Union, New York Immigration Coalition, VOCAL-NY, and the Women’s City Club of New York. Their letter demands that Albany leaders immediately schedule joint, open public hearings of the two houses’ Codes and Judiciary Committees throughout the state to hear testimony and consider proposals to reform the grand jury and criminal justice system as soon as possible after the New Year.

“The broad public outcry following the grand jury decision on Staten Island last week indicates that a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system is warranted and long overdue,” said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause NY. “Public input and participation in that review is not optional. A process following well-worn Albany patterns of secrecy, crafting measures behind closed doors without significant opportunity for public feedback, will fuel, rather than address, public outrage.”

“Reforming the grand jury and criminal justice system is a process that demands transparent and open dialogue among many different groups and constituencies,” said Juan Cartagena, President and General Counsel, LatinoJustice PRLDEF. “All New Yorkers should have the right to discuss, listen, comment and advocate during this extremely important process. It is imperative that the legislature start this process as quickly as possible.”

“The failure to secure an indictment in the killing of Eric Garner leaves New Yorkers with an inescapable question: Do black lives matter?,” asked New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman. “Much remains to be done to repair the culture of policing in New York. An open, transparent, deliberative process to review the failings of the criminal justice system is the right place to start.”

“It is vital that New York’s elected leaders ensure that the public can confidently express their concerns and suggestions to reform our grand jury and criminal justice processes, particularly at this critical time. Citizens Union fully supports and recommends that open hearings take place throughout the state to provide a platform in which the public can meaningfully participate and be heard,” said Dick Dadey, Executive Director, Citizens Union.

"We want to see reform of the system now and it must be inclusive and transparent," said Jacqueline Ebanks, Executive Director, Women’s City Club of New York.

In order to address the public’s desire for change and to gain public trust and support, any reform proposals and resulting legislative action must take place in full public view with myriad opportunities for the public to be heard and participate. The repeated failures across the country to indict officers involved in the deaths of young black men raise serious and disquieting questions about whether the legal standard applied in these situations meets community expectations of police accountability. Fostering good relations between the police and communities is essential for residents’ confidence in their government, and open public hearings on any criminal justice reforms are an essential first step to restoring that trust.

Letter to Governor Cuomo, Senate and Assembly leaders attached.

###

**AALDEF**

99 Hudson Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10013  
(212) 966-5932

**Center for Constitutional Rights**

666 Broadway, 7th Floor, New York, NY  
(212) 614-6464

**Citizens Union**

299 Broadway, New York, NY 10007  
(212) 227-0342

**Common Cause NY**

80 Broad Street, Suite 2704, New York, NY 10004  
(212) 691-6421

**Community Voices Heard**

115 E 106th St, New York, NY 10029  
(212) 860-6001

**Hispanic Federation**

55 Exchange Pl, New York, NY 10005  
(212) 233-8955

**LatinoJustice PRLDEF**

99 Hudson Street 14th Floor, New York, NY 10013  
(212) 219-3360

**NAACP NYS Conference**

1065 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10018  
(212) 344-7474

**New York Civil Liberties Union**

125 Broad Street, New York, NY 10004  
(212) 607-3300

**New York Immigration Coalition**

137 W 25th Street #12, New York, NY 10001  
(212) 627-2227

**VOCAL-NY**

80 4th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217  
(718) 802-9540

**Women’s City Club of New York**

110 West 40th Street #1002, New York, NY 10018  
(212) 353-8070

**December 10, 2014**

**VIA FAX and EMAIL**

Governor Andrew Cuomo  
Executive Chamber  
State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Senator Dean Skelos  
Co-Leader, New York Senate  
LOB Room 909  
Albany, NY 12247

Senator Jeff Klein  
Co-Leader, New York Senate  
LOB Room 913  
Albany, NY 12247

Senator Andrea  
Stewart-Cousins  
Minority Leader  
LOB Room 907  
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblyman Sheldon Silver  
Speaker  
LOB Room 932  
Albany, NY 12248

Assemblyman Brian Kolb  
Minority Leader  
LOB Room 933  
Albany, NY 12248

Assemblymember Joseph Lentol  
Chair, Assembly Codes Committee  
LOB Room 632  
Albany, NY 12448

Assemblymember Helene Weinstein  
Chair, Assembly Judiciary Committee  
LOB Room 831  
Albany, NY 12248

Senator Michael Nozzolio  
Chair, Senate Codes Committee  
Capitol Building Room 503  
Albany, NY 12247

Senator John Bonacic  
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee  
LOB Room 509  
Albany, NY 12247

**Re: Call for Open Public Hearings on Grand Jury and Criminal Justice Reform**

Dear Messrs Cuomo, Skelos, Klein, Silver, Kolb, Lentol, Nozzolio, Bonacic, and Ms. Stewart-Cousins and Weinstein:

Our groups write to call on the Legislature to schedule joint open public hearings of the two houses’ Codes and Judiciary Committees to hear testimony and consider proposals to reform the grand jury and criminal justice system. We strongly urge you to immediately publicly announce a schedule that provides for

sufficient advanced notice for such hearings in locations throughout the state during January, beginning as soon as possible after the New Year.

As the demonstrations taking place in New York City, Albany and other locations in our state show, there is a crisis of public confidence in the fair workings of our criminal justice system following the grand jury decision regarding the death of Eric Garner. Press reports indicate that various legislative proposals reforming the grand jury system are likely to be introduced shortly. Governor Cuomo has called for a “soup to nuts” review of the grand jury and criminal justice system. Discussions regarding such reforms are long overdue.

This important topic cries out for a broad and open discussion between elected leaders, members of the Legislature, advocates, and the public. Public interest in this topic is at a fever pitch, both from those who advocate for specific reforms and those who believe no reforms are necessary. The gravity of the issue requires an approach that goes beyond the usual behind closed doors negotiation process.

In order to address the public’s desire for change and to gain public trust and support, any review and resulting legislative action or inaction must take place in full public view with myriad opportunities for the public to be heard and participate. What should be avoided at all costs is a grand jury-like commission or legislative procedure operating in secrecy with limited public input.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that open public hearings are orderly and successful in eliciting testimony from diverse and representative members of the public.

Sincerely,

Margaret Fung, Executive Director  
Asian American Legal Defense Education Fund

Juan Cartagena, President  
Latino Justice PRLDEF

Vincent Warren, Executive Director  
Center for Constitutional Rights

Dr. Hazel Dukes, President  
NAACP New York State Conference

Dick Dadey, Executive Director  
Citizens Union

Donna Lieberman, Executive Director  
New York Civil Liberties Union

Susan Lerner, Executive Director  
Common Cause NY

Steven Choi, Executive Director  
New York Immigration Coalition

Sondra Youdelman, Executive Director  
Community Voices Heard

Jennifer Flynn, Executive Director  
VOCAL-NY

Jose Calderon, President  
Hispanic Federation

Jacqueline Ebanks, Executive Director  
Women’s City Club of New York

cc (email): John Czajka, Terence O’Leary, Alfonso David  
cc (email): Committee Counsels & Chiefs of Staff