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***Community and Faith Organizations, Activists Launch
#ReleaseMarquis Coalition Outside District Attorney David Soares' Office***

Near the 1-Year Anniversary of Michael Brown's Death in Ferguson, Coalition Demands Soares Recommend a Lesser Sentence in Case of Marquis Dixon and Calls for Indictments for the 3 APD Officers Involved in the Death of Dontay Ivy

ALBANY, NY - Near a national day of action recognizing the one year anniversary of Michael Brown's death in Ferguson at the hands of the Ferguson Police, activists and members of various faith and community organizations rallied outside Albany County District Attorney David Soares' downtown Albany office to launch the Release Marquis Coalition in support of Marquis Dixon, a 16-year-old who was sentenced to nine years in an adult, maximum security prison for stealing a pair of sneakers, and to call for indictments for the three Albany Police Officers involved in the death of Donald "Dontay" Ivy over four months ago.

Following several stories covering his case in local media and subsequent public statements from District Attorney Soares, stating that he believes Marquis Dixon's sentence was appropriate, the Release Marquis Coalition was formed to demand Soares reverse his position and instead recommend a lesser sentence as the case moves through the appeals process and, more broadly, to support legislation being proposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo that would raise the age of criminal responsibility and divert 16 and 17 year olds away from adult correctional facilities.

Marquis Dixon's mother, Aisha Dixon, spoke during the press conference outside Soares' office about what she and her family have been going through since Marquis has been incarcerated and said, "I talk with Marquis regularly on the phone and write him constantly and he is still in good spirits but I wonder for how long? We just want Marquis home. Every day he is in prison is another we are in prison with him because every day all we do is think and worry about him. We just want him home. He made a mistake but the punishment handed down is cruel and District Attorney Soares has a chance to make things right."

Jacqui Williams, a member of Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, said, "A small group of CAAMI activists met with Marquis Dixon at Cocksackie Correctional Facility in June. We were struck by the complete contradiction between the young man we met with - a thoughtful teenager with hopes, dreams and a good heart - and the setting where we met him, a maximum security adult prison where he expects to spend up to nine years. Talking with Marquis convinced us that he does not belong in an adult prison and should not have been sentenced to nine years. He is a kid. Hold him accountable if he did something wrong, but don't forget that he is still a teenager."

Contrary to Soares' public statements that he was elected in 2004 to be "tough on crime," Soares' election was specifically a public indictment against such a mentality, at a time when activists and progressives were pushing for reforms in the harsh Rockefeller Drug Laws that mandated harsh minimum sentences and did nothing to curtail the drug epidemic of that time. If "tough on crime" is

the mindset guiding the District Attorney's office, the Release Marquis Coalition believes that needs to change.

Cessie Alfonso, a board member for Citizen Action of the Capital District which has previously endorsed District Attorney David Soares, said, "I am here today to say that locking up Marquis Dixon for nine years does nothing positive for Mr. Dixon; does nothing positive for this community; and is a tragic waste of both taxpayer dollars and a young man's life. We call on District Attorney David Soares to stand up and be the champion we voted for."

The case of Marquis Dixon is but one example in just one District Attorney's office in New York where predominately young men of color are overcharged and given harsh, excessive sentences in prison. New York has the distinction of being one of two states in the country that automatically treats 16 and 17-year-olds as adults. The Release Marquis Coalition supports legislation that would raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York and demands District Attorney Soares support this common sense reform.

"Science tells us that most adolescent brains are not fully developed until age 25, confirming what most parents already knew: youth are impulsive, susceptible to peer pressure, rarely consider long-term consequences, and are comfortable making risky decisions. On that fact alone, nine years in adult prison for stealing sneakers will never be an 'appropriate sentence' because 16-year-olds do not belong in adult prisons. Sentencing youth as adults rarely corrects offensive behavior, but often sets the stage for future crime and victims by erecting lifelong barriers to productive citizenship. If District Attorneys are serious about improving public safety, they should stop relying on excessive adult sentences that increase incidents of re-arrest and instead endorse holding youth accountable for their actions with developmentally-appropriate consequences that address the underlying needs that lead them to crime in the first place," **said Brad Hansen, Public Policy Coordinator of Families Together in New York State, a non-profit, family-run organization that strives to establish a unified voice for families of children and youth with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.**

"In the adult system, Marquis and other youth like him will spend their formative years locked away in adult prisons where they are often targets of abuse by inmates and staff, at risk of sexual assault, solitary confinement, and suicide. Raising the age of criminal responsibility is one of many opportunities we have to break these cycles of recidivism and victimization, improve public safety in our communities, and use resources in a way that gives our youth a chance to become more than the worst thing they ever did," said Hansen.

The coalition also called for indictments in the case of Donald "Dontay" Ivy, who was approached and tased to death over four months ago by three Albany Police officers - Michael Mahany, Joshua Sears, and Charles Skinkle - who still walk free today. The Albany Police Department has largely been silent as the District Attorney's office investigates the incident but reports in local media reveal that the officers involved had no reason to approach him and that he was only guilty of being cold in a particularly harsh winter.

Angelica Clarke, Executive Director of the Albany Social Justice Center and a member of Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, said, "A little over four months ago, Dontay Ivy was killed by 3 officers of the Albany Police Department about 150 feet from his doorstep. Since then, the Albany Police Department, elected officials and District Attorney's office have been silent about any details on his death. In the past couple weeks, many local police officers have been

charged with various crimes, large and small, and yet we have been expected to wait months after officers kill someone for any attempt at justice? Today, we're done waiting. We have sought answers at every possible level of city government. We demand indictments for the 3 officers involved. Nothing less will be acceptable."

Reverend Valerie Faust of Living Word Tabernacle, who taught Dontay when he attended elementary school, said, "I knew Dontay Ivy when he was a young boy, and I'm devastated that such a kind man could be so terribly taken from our community. In the midst of an epidemic of police violence against people of color across the country, it is unconscionable that we are still waiting on the results of this investigation. It is an open wound in our city that cannot begin to heal until answers are provided. David Soares must immediately conclude the investigation and hold the officers responsible to account."

Near the one year anniversary of Michael Brown's death at the hands of Ferguson Police, activists urged Soares to bring indictments and not repeat the same miscarriage of justice that took place in Ferguson and has taken place time and time again in cities across the country.

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