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APRIL 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**ALI LAUNCHES LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM
INITIATIVE**

The Allegheny Lawyers Initiative for Justice (ALI) is a diverse coalition of attorneys, investigators, and social workers who collectively have defended tens of thousands of people within the local criminal justice system. ALI's mission is to advocate for smart and innovative solutions that will improve that system. ALI is a non-partisan 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

On the frontlines representing the accused, we see firsthand the system's inequities. We've watched too many families ripped apart when a loved one is shipped off to prison. We've seen too many young lives ruined by a felony conviction. Too many of those young people are Black and poor. The permanent collateral consequences of a felony conviction – which include barriers to securing gainful employment and obtaining housing – have a ripple effect that spreads beyond the convicted person. When a person is convicted of a felony offense, that also has a life-long impact on their partner and children. When a person is stripped away from their community and sent to prison, that also devastates their parents. The practice of labeling too many people as felons also negatively impacts the broader community.

The local criminal justice system hasn't been significantly re-tooled in the decades we've been practicing law. But over that same period, scientific research and experience in other cities has shown that thoughtful change can improve outcomes – not only for the individuals directly involved in the system, but also in surrounding communities, where people are safer and have more trust in the system. With the benefit of these examples as well as the insight gained from the national reckoning on race following George Floyd's killing, now is the time to re-examine the local criminal justice system and search for ways to improve it.



ALI believes that any serious effort to improve the criminal justice system must take into account the perspective of the accused and the attorneys who represent them. ALI and its members will push reform through media and issue advocacy, impact litigation, and data collection and analysis. Early on, ALI expects to focus on pretrial-diversion programs and jail-population reduction. Our jails serve a purpose in protecting the community, but not to warehouse hundreds of non-violent offenders who often are awaiting trial and presumed innocent.

Finally, our group is different from other organizations and stakeholders who perform work related to the local criminal justice system. First, we are independent. We are not beholden to county governmental and political leaders. While we have friends and colleagues who work throughout the system and we intend to work collaboratively with other system stakeholders, our independence provides us with the ability to move quickly and speak candidly – as well as to challenge the status quo when necessary. Second, our members work in the trenches and see and feel the system’s inequities firsthand. We understand what works and what areas need improvement. We are motivated to be a leading voice for positive change.

END OF RELEASE
