



For 31 years New York has distinguished itself as leading the nation with the most repressive, draconian mandatory minimum sentencing laws, known as the Rockefeller Drug Laws. After years of waiting and suffering on **December 7, 2004** history was made in New York State. A bi-partisan legislative agreement has been reached by Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver to reform the sentencing provisions of the Rockefeller Drug Laws. Over the years there have been many players in the trenches fighting against these unfair laws but **Michael Blain**, Director of Public Policy for the Drug Policy Alliance, the largest drug policy agency in the world, got down in the mud to help make history. This quiet, behind the scenes **"Mover & Shaker"** used his **political clout, street credibility and community partnerships** to pull off what many were unable to accomplish and start the ball rolling toward full drug law reform.

**We caught up with Michael and got a chance to ask him about the New Bill and the role he played.**

**Q: Tell me about the Drug Policy Alliance and what you do?** A: The Drug Policy Alliance is the nation's leading drug policy reform organization, focusing primarily on ending the War on Drugs by using reason, compassion, justice, and any other means that we find necessary. I am the policy director responsible for putting together and running our state campaigns, like the Rockefeller reform campaign. We presently have eight campaigns in various states. I also shape the public policy agenda for the organization.

**Q: After 31 years what made the difference this year?** A: New York has the worst mandatories in the country and they have existed so long because New Yorkers play hardball politics. The difference this year and in years to come will be the restructuring of the political environment. If you can't get good, sound, public policy that reflects the will of the people, then you have to begin to replace the policy makers that have given lip-service to reform year after year. I also believe the election of a host of new elected officials, including David Soares, Albany's first Black D.A. who ran on the platform of Drug Law Reform to beat incumbent D.A. Paul Clyne, played a key role toward reform. We have real needs and we need real people in Albany and other counties in N.Y.S.

**Q: Are you happy with the results?** A: I am happy to see the will of the people begin to make a difference because it is the fuel we will need to accomplish our ultimate goal; the full repeal of the Rockefeller drug laws. I am happy to see a movement building and people in New York City, where most of the Rockefeller drug law political prisoners come from, being heard in Albany. I'm happy for this half a step in the right direction, but I will not rest, as none of us should rest until we have completely undone the damage that has been done to our communities by the war on drugs.

**Q: What are your future plans for the Rockefeller and other drug laws nationwide?** A: We will continue to organize in the streets of every state that holds dear these devastating mandatory minimums that disproportionately send our loved ones to far away places so their screams cannot be heard. We will continue to replace legislators until we get good legislation that reflects the needs and the will of the people. Real reform of the Rockefeller drug laws must contain: 1. Full judicial discretion 2. Retroactivity 3. Treatment 4. Sentence Reduction. We will continue to play the outside and the inside game until "victory is won."

**Q: What can those incarcerated and in the community do to bring about full drug law reform?** A: Incarcerated people and the community can join the Real Reform campaign and join us in the fight to repeal the Rockefeller drug laws. If you were behind the walls, as I used to be, remember this; you owe. You have a responsibility to educate those that are coming behind you, to make peace with your families, so that they can with good conscience join this fight, and most importantly, never give up. Your spirit must be intact when you come home, because you will lead this battle; if not you, then who?!?! The community can vote their values and value their vote! The community can start by remembering that these people that we let others so cavalierly call "inmates, offenders, thugs..." are our Mothers, Fathers, sisters, and brothers. Let's first get real and then get busy!!!

**Q: What are the Changes?** A: The harshest sentences are reduced from 15-years-to-life to a determinate 8 years making offenders eligible for release in 7. It eliminates the maximum term of life for the most serious offenses. The common sentence of 3 years to life for many offenders would become a determinate sentence of 3 years, making offenders eligible for release in about 2 years. Nonviolent drug offenders are eligible sooner for treatment programs. Double the amounts, by weight, of heroin and other substances that defendants have to be caught with to qualify for the harshest of charges. Lastly, nearly 450 inmates serving time under the harshest sentences (15-years-to-life or 25-years-to-life) could ask the courts to reduce their prison time in line with the new law.

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