

Fall 2006 Newsletter

MARC Honored For Its CORI Reform Efforts By The Boston City Council, 2005



MARC Update:

15 months ago, participants of UMN's Institute for Neighborhood Leadership activist training program said that the biggest issue facing communities of color in the city of Boston was the states draconian CORI laws. Participants rationalized that unless obstacles to successful reentry to formerly incarcerated individuals is addressed there will be no way to make communities safe and develop new jobs and economies. "Until you address why people are denied jobs, health care, housing, insurance or education because of their criminal records, said a leading community activist, our neighborhoods will be less safe, no matter what programs you create or how much community building you do." From UMN's perspective, the CORI issue addressed all of our criteria as to what makes a winnable issue:

- Does it affect people and communities
- Is it an issue in the community that people could readily understand
- Do people feel strongly about the issue.
- Could it mobilize people and help build community
- Could we organize around it, and finally,
- Could we win it

Partnering with the Mass Law Reform Institute, the *Massachusetts Alliance to Reform (MARC) CORI* was born. MARC is a statewide network of activists, organizations, churches, labor unions, businesses and individuals with CORI committed to making a saner, more just, and less punitive system. MARC believes for change and individual and community transformation to occur, people must be given a second chance from past mistakes. And in a remarkably short period of time, MARC under UMN's leadership, successfully led an effort that saw the first positive criminal justice reform in the nation in more than a generation. Consider:

MARC victories:

- Boston, Cambridge, and Brockton City Councils as well as town meetings in cities and towns around the Commonwealth unanimously passed a CORI Reform Resolution calling on the state legislature to reform CORI
- Organized the turnout of over 900 individuals to support CORI Reform before the Senate/House Judiciary Committee Hearings on the proposed CORI Reform Bills on three separate occasions

- Boston and Cambridge City Councils unanimously passing Fair CORI Hiring Policy requirement for all Vendors contracted with the City. In a New York Times Editorial on March 6, 2006, our work was called "visionary and should be emulated around the country."
- The City of San Francisco modeled their fair hiring policy after the City of Boston's Fair CORI Hiring Policy. The cities of Honolulu, New York City, and Chicago, have since passed similar municipal legislation.
- Received national attention for successfully blocking a high school principle's efforts to deny students the ability to attend their senior prom because their dates had a CORI.
- After a successful lobbying campaign led by MARC, The Massachusetts Senate unanimously passed land mark CORI reform legislation during their deliberations on the state budget. The effort to pass reform legislation died in the House because the House Judiciary Chair, Eugene O'Flaherty, refused to endorse the legislation.

Our work was recognized all over the country, and UMN received a number of awards for its ground breaking work, including honors from the Criminal Justice Policy Coalition, Community Change, and the Stanley Jones Clean Slate Project. The Boston City Council honored MARC with a resolution for "its stellar statewide organizing work."

Even more fascinating was that we were able to accomplish so much with so little. Under financed and understaffed, UMN's ability to develop coalitions, build relationships, and develop skilled committed volunteer activists was the difference. City Councilor Chuck Turner, author of the landmark City Council CORI ordinance said, "This was the first time in 40 years that I have seen such a powerful and successful coalition that transcended racial and class lines, led by people of color."

Find out more about UMN's involvement on the CORI issue by checking our Website. www.unionofminorityneighborhoods.org, and find out what you can do to help craft sane criminal justice policy.



April 20th 2006 CORI Rally at Boston Commons
Congressman Major Owens was our keynote speaker

MARC Activities:

- Ongoing organizing/strategy meetings---call for more details
- West Broadway Development CORI Help Center organized by Ann Higgins
- With Mass Law Reform Institute, monitoring effectiveness of local CORI ordinances.

[Continued on page three]

Dear Family,

These have been very interesting times at the Union of Minority Neighborhoods.

There has been change... the departure of our beloved Mary and the addition of Yirgalem, who I guarantee will do great things. And, under the leadership of Board Chair David Yamada, our board of directors has grown in size and stability. There is further change coming as David will soon be transitioning off of the board, while Althea Roach Thomas will soon assume the chairmanship of the organization.

There has been success. GREAT SUCCESS! Our work on behalf of criminal justice reform has spearheaded the first real reform in the criminal justice system in a generation. We won resolutions calling for reform of the CORI laws in a number of cities, and in the cities of Boston and Cambridge, winning landmark municipal reform legislation that the New York Times called "visionary". Our criminal justice reform legislation was passed unanimously in the Senate, and our work on the issue has inspired activists around the country.

We continue to provide the best training for activists of color throughout the region. SEIU local 1199, Massachusetts Jobs with Justice, and other organizations have hired our participants. We've been honored by organizations in and around the area. The Boston City Council honored us with a resolution for our "stellar organizing campaign on behalf of CORI reform.

No question UMN has made a difference.

You'll learn more about our work these past few months in this issue of our newsletter. Hopefully, what becomes clear is that your involvement as well as your generous financial support has made our success possible.

We are busy at work planning our agenda for change and justice for the coming year.. We will be back in the statehouse to finish what we started on CORI reform. We'll be pushing for passage of our legislation to create a fund to support community based non-profits. We'll be working with leaders around the country in crafting a strategy that addresses the issue of urban poverty. We will develop new ideas to train a new generation of grassroots community leadership. We will continue to lead and work with Mayor Ken Reeves and Councilor Chuck Turner in efforts to bring black and immigrant leaders together on an agenda of change and mutual cooperation. We will continue to work on organizing black men to become involved and engaged in their communities

Please continue to support our work. Your generous contributions have made a tremendous difference in the lives of people. We hope and pray that you will continue to support an organization that is truly making a difference. Enclosed is an envelope for you to use to mail in your tax-deductible donation.

Peace, Horace



MARY'S GONE!!!

Yeah that's right. Mary Grissom, our unbelievably efficient and competent projects coordinator has moved on to bigger and most definitely, better things. Mary's contributions to the Union have been fantastic. Mary joined our team the first day we began operations in Massachusetts in 2002. Mary assisted in the development of planning and programs, in community organizing and strategy, program development, and was the lead organizer of our "Givers to the Community" dinner. According to Horace Small, UMN's ED, "Mary and I spent more time together than we did with anybody else and that included our families. She was a pleasure to train and to watch as she developed into a highly effective and sophisticated agent for change. Mary is still very much a part of the Union family as well as my personal family. We talk all the time. Hell, she's our dinner committee co-chair! Sue and I view her as our daughter. Mary is now the Policy Director for City Councilor Sam Yoon. Congrats to Sam for knowing talent when he sees it"

Thank you Mary for all that you did. We love you and you'll always be a part of the Union family.



YIRGALEMS IN!!!

Mary may have left the day to day, but before she left she made sure that UMN was going to be in capable hands.

Replacing Mary is Yirgalem Madie. Originally from Ethiopia, Yirgalem and her family settled in Portland Maine. A 2004 graduate of Bridgewater State College, Yirgalem is currently pursuing a masters in International Development at the School of International Management in Brattleboro, Vermont. Yirgalem comes to UMN as an experienced social activist and organizer, working on immigration and worker rights issues while a high school student in Portland, as well as at Bridgewater State. Yirgalem's personality is just like that of UMN's...soft spoken but powerful, direct and to the point, passionate about justice, and resolute in seeing that poor people get power...and doing our jobs professionally and skillfully. You'll be seeing Yirgalem at many upcoming events, but if you can't wait till then, give her a holla at the office

MARC Activities: [continued from front page]

- Lobby state senators, representatives, and municipal councilors and selectmen
- Statewide municipal efforts to pass local reform ordinances in cities throughout Massachusetts
- Provide training to individuals and organizations in the skills needed to be effective in affecting change through UMN's MARC University
- Provide advocacy for CORI'd individuals; connecting them with a network of service providers in areas of housing, jobs, treatment, skill building, education; assistance with obtaining and understanding their CORI reports; and attempting to seal CORI entries.
- Sponsored the "Balancing Public Safety and Second Chances: Retooling CORI Laws" conference with the Criminal Justice Institute at Harvard Law School October 1, 2005, attended by almost 400 individuals.

MARC has laid the groundwork for real criminal justice reform in Massachusetts. Join us as we enter the legislative fray in 2007 to finish what we set out to do.

UMN HONORS: MAYOR KEN REEVES, THE STAFF OF MASSACHUSETTS JOBS WITH JUSTICE, AND REFLECT AND STRENGTHEN AT GIVERS TO THE COMMUNITY CELEBRATION FEBRUARY 9, 2007!

The 4th annual Givers to the Community Awards Dinner will be held on Friday evening February 9th 2007 in the Ballroom on the campus of Simmons College.

Our annual dinner honors those community leaders and activists who's efforts to addressing issues affecting communities of color have a difference in the lives of people in the community. This years Givers to the Community honorees are truly outstanding and represent the best and most dynamic leaders in communities of color. They are:

- **The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves**, Mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts, for His efforts in support of Criminal Justice reform and reform of the CORI system in particular. Through his leadership, Cambridge joined Boston in enacting local ordinances banning discrimination against people with CORI's. The New York Times called these actions "enlightening and a model for cities around the country."
- **The Staff of the Massachusetts Jobs with Justice Campaign**. The staff led by Director Russ Davis, passionately supports the work of citizen activists of color on issues affecting communities. Their efforts in saving Affirmative Action, their support of the Many Voices One Message coalition for a fair and just state budget, and their efforts in support of CORI reform, make JWJ a most worthy recipient. And the Paul David Wellstone Award for Outstanding Youth leadership goes to:
- **Reflect and Strengthen**, was founded by a group of dynamic young women in the Dorchester community whose lives were disrupted by violence in their communities. Their work in developing the leadership skills of young women of color by raising their levels of consciousness which then empowers them to become effective and confident advocates for change is a model that works and should be emulated.

Make Friday February 9th the first thing you put in your 2007 calendar. Expect to get a save the date card real soon, and check our web site as we will be posting updates regularly. For more information contact UMN, or visit our website at www.unionofminorityneighborhoods.org.

See You February 9th, 2007

UMN RECEIVES FORD FOUNDATION FELLOWS



Left to Right Chris Bridges, Ashlin Mattos, Penny Krakoff, Ford Foundation Fellows, Horace Small, in the center Rachel Anderson with Episcopal Mission Society

This summer, UMN was fortunate enough to have acquired the services of 3 college students who were chosen as Ford Foundation Fellows. The fellows chosen for their campus activism and leadership skills attended a number of symposiums organized by Professor Kristin Bumiller at Amherst College. After a week studying at the Kennedy School of Government, the fellows received a one-month internship with UMN. The students were required to engage in meaningful work with the organization.

The Interns, Penny Krakoff is a student leader at Chico State University in Chico, California. Other interns included Ashlin Matos, a student leader at Fresno State University, and Chris Bridges, a graduate of North Carolina Central University, and currently a Masters candidate in Criminal Justice at Michigan State University. Each worked on separate projects...Ashlin in developing UMN's project to improve Black/Immigrant relations in the region and Penny and Chris worked with Horace Small and Professor James Jennings, in developing a concept paper on a national initiative addressing urban poverty starting in 2007 called *The New Urban Agenda*.

The interns did a fantastic job. Ashlin organized with Mayor Ken Reeves and members of Team Unity a gathering of Black and immigrant leadership held in city hall and was attended by over 100 civic leaders to determine ways in which leaders can work and support one another. Penny and Chris created a working paper that is currently being circulated among leaders of color around the country.

The Ford interns acquired invaluable experience in social justice work. The following is Penny Krakoffs thoughts on her time with UMN.



Penny Krakoff

"Social justice is a lifestyle!" is the unofficial slogan of the Union of Minority Neighborhoods. Nearly everyday of my month-long internship at UMN the executive director, Horace Small, would recite these words. At the beginning of the internship I didn't really conceptualize what this ideology entailed. I just kept hearing "social justice is a lifestyle, social justice is a lifestyle" repeated over and over again.

I have been involved in 'social justice' nearly all my life. I volunteer for a variety of projects. I have worked with the homeless and with prison inmates. Before my internship at the UMN I participated in a two-week program on social justice at Amherst College. I still would not have described my lifestyle as "social justice". So at the start of the internship I was pretty much just excited to be living in Boston for the summer and having the opportunity to gain some practical experience along the way.

Day one of the internship I met with Horace and Jackie Lageson (director of CORI reform). Horace showed me around Boston,

allowing me to get a feel for the community I would be working in for the next month. He gave an overview of the projects UMN has been working on. Later that first week, my colleague Chris Bridges and I met with Horace and James Jennings of Tufts University to plan a conference for summer of 2007. They explained the basic concept of the conference as being about forming a 'New Urban Agenda'. Chris and I began planning the basic outline of the conference. We brainstormed a list of possible constituents who would have a vested interest in the conference. We then split up the list and began researching information that would pertain to each subgroup. This information will be very helpful in putting the conference together. Preparing for the conference took up the bulk of our time at the internship.

As the month progressed I really began to understand what Horace meant by "social justice is a life style." Making a commitment toward social justice is making a conscious effort to increase equality for all people. Social justice isn't just something you can turn off and on like the evening news. The relationships I built and the leadership skills I acquired at the Union of Minority Neighborhoods will forever be a part of me, because like Horace says best, "social justice is a lifestyle."

NON-PROFIT LEGISLATION FIGHT TO BEGIN IN NEXT LEGISLATIVE SESSION

In December, legislation drafted by UMN and UMN's non-profit task force, will be introduced in both houses of the legislature for consideration in 2007. If enacted, this legislation would provide essential and much needed financial assistance to community based non-profit organizations fighting for their survival.

The bill calls for the creation of the *Commonwealth Community Fund*, a quasi-governmental foundation that will provide financial and technical assistance to community based non-profit organizations in Massachusetts with budgets under \$750,000 a year. Created through a one-time lottery game or a direct appropriation from the states surplus that could produce an operating fund of \$50-75 Million to start. The fund would be governed by an independent board and Executive Director, and the Fund would provide needed financial assistance to organizations in need of board and staff development, fundraising planning, strategic planning, as well as make available one time emergency grants that would help organizations financially survive while they re-organize and create new sources of revenues.

"I am proud to have my name associated with this legislation", said Representative Frank Smizik, Chair of the House Committee on environmental affairs, and the lead sponsor in the House for this legislation. "Community based non-profits play an extremely vital role in addressing the needs of our most needy and worthy citizens. As corporations can count on the support of government for help during difficult times, there is no such vehicle to help struggling non-profits. We must do everything in our power to see to it that those who help others also be helped when they're in need. Community based non-profits as well as myself are indeed grateful to UMN and its Non-profit task force for its vision and leadership in helping citizen organizations survive tight economic times." concluded Smizik. You too can help make this legislation possible. For a draft of the legislation or to get involved, call the Union at 617-541-4111

UMN GETS IT'S 501C3!

FINALLY!!! The Internal Revenue Service decided to give UMN 501c3. Damn it sure took long enough!

We don't know why our friends in the Federal government waited so long to decide our status. Perhaps they finally figured out we weren't being supported by hostile governments. Or maybe they read that Boston Magazine article on Horace and decided he was too unstable to make any organization he heads tax exempt.

Whatever it was, it wasn't until UMN's attorney extraordinaire Phil Jordan from Bingham/McCutcheon got involved. Within a couple of months, we not only received our federal tax-exempt status, we were registered with the state as well.

Many thanks Phil Jordan for an outstanding job. And special thanks to UMN board member Joe Leavey and the staff of Communities for People, who have been our fiscal sponsor since our first days, if not for them we would not be here today.

INSTITUTE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP

The Institute for Neighborhood Leadership enjoyed another solid year of providing the best in skills training for emerging and interested people of color in the skills of community participation, civic leadership, and community empowerment.

Since its founding in 2002, more than 1000 individuals have attended a UMN training. The result is much needed community activists becoming engaged on the issues affecting the community. Scores of new community based organizations have been created, and more than 50 individuals have acquired jobs as professional organizers.

Another exciting year is expected when the Institute resumes classes in January 2007. A curriculum and course offerings will be posted onto our web site by mid November. For more information or information on upcoming events that will be organized by the Institute, call the office or check the website to see class offerings and other information.



Criminal Justice Learning Network

Written by: Jackie Lageson

The Union of Minority Neighborhoods is a member organization of the Criminal Justice Coalition Learning Network. The Criminal Justice Coalition Learning Network is a collaborative of a number of organizations that includes the Swedenborg Chapel of Cambridge, Episcopal Mission Society, SPAN Inc., X-Cel Adult Education, and Project Place. The City Mission Society of Boston is the lead organization, and the project is funded through a grant from Third Sector New England.

The Network's mission is to build partnerships between individuals, families, and organizations committed to the empowerment of

disenfranchised citizens. Through community organizing, providing broad based educational training to develop the activist skills of participants, and strategies and actions that will promote legislative reform of the criminal justice system in Massachusetts is how the mission will be accomplished. The goal is to expand our thinking on how to effectively engage a broader segment of the public on these issues.

The Learning Network consists of three phases: 1. Identifying Constituents, 2. Training and Empowerment, 3. Public Education / Legislative Advocacy

The Union of Minority Neighborhoods will take primary responsibility for the Training and Empowerment portion of the Network. A stated objective of The Learning Network is to develop a training and empowerment model for these activists and organizations and to make it widely available through Group-Building and Information-Sharing. The Learning Network hopes its work will bridge differences in culture, experience, conflict resolution, and communication. By meeting these objectives, participating members will increase our capacity to work together, and thus more effective activists and agents for change will emerge.

The Union of Minority Neighborhoods will also be a major player in the Public Education and Legislative Advocacy phase of this project. Our hope is that the Learning Network will expand, and more criminal-justice groups will join and coordinate their reform efforts with the Network. At the end of the day, the ideas that unite us will emerge and become more important than those that divide us.

For more information about the Learning Network, contact Jackie Lageson at 617-201-3238

UMN and Elected Officials of Color Organize Communities of Color

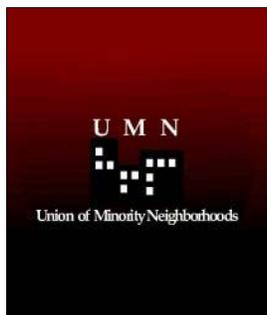


Councilor Chuck Turner, Mayor Reeves, Councilors Sam Yoon, Charles Yancey, and Denise Simmons, not pictured Felix Arroyo.

On July 27th 2006 the Union of Minority Neighborhoods, with Team Unity, city councilor Denise Simmons of Cambridge, and Mayor Ken Reeves of Cambridge hosted a dinner gathering of more than a hundred African American, and immigrant leaders in the greater Boston area to discuss issues of common concerns and strategies to work more closely together.

More than 30 participants of the dinner agreed to serve as planning committee working with elected of color to develop a broad based strategic plan identifying issues services and strategies to be addressed in the next few years recognizing our communities problems require developing common solutions.

A November activity is currently being planned. For more information or to find out how you can participate contact UMN.



The **mission** of the Union of Minority Neighborhoods is to ensure that skilled, committed, grassroots leaders of color, effectively organize on issues of concern in their communities, regions and nation. Based in Boston, we bring our mission to life by: 1. Developing skills 2. Supporting movements 3. Building broad-based coalitions

Our programs are constituent driven. Activists develop skills and then put these skills into practice by organizing on the issues that affect them.

The facts speak for themselves:

In Massachusetts, Blacks are 5.4% of the population, 26.4% of incarcerated adults. Latinos are 6.8% of the population, 26.2% of incarcerated adults.

In Massachusetts, Blacks and Latinos are 12.2% of the population. Only 5% of state senators and representatives are Black or Latino and 0% of congressmen.

In Boston 86% of white students graduate high school, only 76% of blacks and 55% of Latinos do.

In Boston, the unemployment rate for Black men is 42%.

It is time to say **ENOUGH!**

Communities working together, uniting for change, can and will make a difference.