

The New York Times

LETTERS

The Harm That Drug Laws Do

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To the Editor:

Re “Racial Inequity and Drug Arrests” (editorial, May 10):

The application over the past 35 years of the Rockefeller drug laws in New York State has produced one of the starkest examples of racial disparity in the nation. Ninety percent of the people confined in New York’s prisons under these mandatory sentencing statutes are African-American or Latino, although research shows that the majority of drug users and sellers are white.

These laws are problematic for reasons other than racial bias. They are very expensive — it costs New York more than \$500 million annually to confine the more than 13,000 nonviolent drug offenders in its prisons.

Studies have shown, moreover, that treatment is much more successful in reducing the crime associated with the drug trade than incarceration.

The Rockefeller drug laws are wasteful, ineffective and marked by racial inequities. It is long past time for New York’s leaders to enact their repeal.

Robert Gangi

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New York, May 12, 2008