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*City of Milwaukee Common Council*

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## **President Hines Calls For Action In Evaluating Milwaukee's Racial Disparities**

*Calls on Community Justice Council to Address New Findings*

Two major studies – one by *The Sentencing Project* and one by *Human Rights Watch* – were released yesterday, both of which critique our national war on drugs. For Milwaukee and Wisconsin, the findings of these studies are especially grave.

As the *Journal Sentinel* has reported, blacks in Milwaukee are seven times more likely to be arrested for drug offenses than whites, and Milwaukee has the second highest racial disparity for drug arrests among all major U.S. cities. At the same time, blacks in Wisconsin are 42 times more likely than whites to receive prison terms for drug convictions, and Wisconsin has the highest racial disparity in drug sentencing in the nation.

The use and purchase of drugs in Milwaukee must be forcefully affronted at every turn. Neither practice is ever acceptable. I know full well that drugs destroy individuals, families and neighborhoods, and I will never condone such destruction.

At the same time, I also know that justice must be blind. Legal sentencing and enforcement should never be influenced by skin color or ethnicity. Drug users and dealers must be punished swiftly, but that punishment must be levied justly and equally among perpetrators, regardless of racial background.

The communities in our state and our city are already being ravaged by drug use. If residents cannot trust our criminal justice system to be fair and impartial, that only compounds our problems. We must internally evaluate our system. I believe that action is urgently needed, and I further believe that the newly formed Community Justice Council is the place to start:

As a member of its Data Analysis and Information Committee, I am calling on the Community Justice Council to narrow its focus and assess racial disparities within our justice system. The Community Justice Council is an important County-City initiative that shares resources from all arenas of local government, including the Milwaukee Police Department, the County Courts, the Sheriff's Department and others. The Community Justice Council is the right body to address the local findings of *The Sentencing Project* and *Human Rights Watch*.