

THE NEIGHBORHOOD
DEFENDER
SERVICE
OF HARLEM

Telephone:
212 · 876-5500
Fax: 876-5586

55 West 125th Street
2nd Floor
New York, New York 10027

December 18, 1995

Leonard Noisette, *Project Director*

The New York Amsterdam News
2340 Frederick Douglass Boulevard
New York, New York 10027

To the Editor:

I am the Director of the Neighborhood Defender Service, a not-for-profit, community-based law office that has provided criminal defense services to poor Harlem residents since 1990. On December 1, 1995, in response to the city's solicitation, we submitted a proposal for funding to continue providing these services. Given your report of the controversy that surrounds the city's decision to contract with agencies other than the Legal Aid Society to provide criminal defense services to poor New Yorkers ("Guliani's Plan to Exclude Legal Aid from Bidding Contract Called Unfair," Saturday, December 9, 1995), I felt it appropriate to share our views.

For the past five years, the Neighborhood Defender Service (NDS) has provided the means for residents of Harlem to receive criminal defense representation in a radically different and improved way than that to which poor New Yorkers have grown accustomed. Harlem residents now have the opportunity to be represented by a lawyer based in their own community and accessible to them. They are able to request that a lawyer begin to represent them or a loved one when they are still being detained at a police facility, or even before arrest. And they benefit from our model of team defense that uses lawyers, investigators and caseworkers to thoroughly investigate cases, increase contact with clients and devote substantial attention to clients' social service needs. Those of your readers familiar with our work know that NDS provides a high-quality service that is good for clients, the courts and the administration of justice.

We appreciate the concerns raised by the Legal Aid Society and its supporters related to the city's intended reduction of the Society's caseload. We feel it is equally important, however, that your readers understand that the very existence of NDS is at risk.

The Legal Aid Society, while facing the possibility of a reduction in its size, will remain the primary defender of poor people in criminal matters in New York City. On the other hand,

any continued funding that NDS is to receive from the city is dependent upon the outcome of the current contracting process. If we are not awarded a contract, NDS will be forced to close.

We do not question the dedication and fine work of the Legal Aid Society. We have submitted a proposal because we believe that the high-quality, unique alternative provided by NDS should continue to be available to New Yorkers as well.

Sincerely,

Leonard E. Noisette
Director