

MAYOR BLOOMBERG DEFENDS STOP-AND-FRISK PRACTICE



Reacting to the overall disapproval and all round condemnation of the police department's stop and frisk practice, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has recently adopted a somewhat assuaging tone and assured the critics that the police officers will be educated to behave more considerately and that the practice would become less frequent. However, the Mayor's statement was not considered enough by a coalition of labor unions who on Wednesday called upon the mayor and the police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, to lend their support to legislation pending before the City Council that would unequivocally ban racial profiling and establish an inspector general in the Police Department. In a statement the coalition accused Mayor Bloomberg and Mr. Kelly of failure to address the issue. They said that they "continue to fail to address the central fact that each year hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are illegally and unjustly stopped-and-frisked simply because they are people of color. We need a major overhaul of the out-of-control, unlawful and discriminatory practices of the N.Y.P.D." The statement further stated, "If the Mayor and the Police Commissioner are serious about reform, they must support the Community Safety Act bills that are pending in the City Council, which are an essential first step towards ending discriminatory policing and improving police accountability in New York City." The statement was issued by Communities United for Police Reform, an umbrella group of organizations opposed to stop-and-frisk; 1199 S.E.I.U., the health care workers union; Local 32BJ, a building workers union; the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union; LatinoJustice PRLDEF, a Latino advocacy organization, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Last year the police carried out stop and frisk checks on 684,330 people. What the coalition finds objectionable is that of the total people frisked, more than 600,000 were black or Latino, leading to claims and allegations of racial profiling. Bloomberg, speaking at a black church recently, accepted that his stop and frisk policy was not perfect and that it had its flaws but said that it was a justified and appropriate crime-fighting tool and should be "mended, not ended." Mayor Bloomberg and Mr. Kelly have strongly refuted the charges that police officers are engaging in racial profiling and deliberately targeting blacks and Latino's, but say that they stop people, who to them seem like would-be criminals and whose behavior arouses suspicion and distrust. Some of the black and Latinos who have been stopped and frisked have alleged that they have been subjected to racially derogatory language by the police officers. Although Mayor Bloomberg has stated that he is asking his officers to behave with a little more decorum and courtesy, he has categorically declined the proposal to create an inspector general for the police department, refusing it saying that it was not required and was even unsure if the City Council had the legal authority to create such a position.