

Majority Legislators failed Minority Community

In spite of the pleas of many eloquent and persuasive speakers at the County Legislature meeting in December, the majority members failed to support a non-partisan, merit-based process to select the next Public Defender. The office of the Public Defender plays a key role for all those in Monroe County who could not afford to hire a defense lawyer if they were in trouble with the law. Even those who do have the means to afford competent counsel have a vital interest in “Equal justice under law,” which is required for stability and peace in a community.

As our area tries to deal with so many serious issues of poverty, job loss, and violence, we do not need to add to that violence a secretive, tainted method of choosing one who is responsible for justice for those who are poor. The demanding job of the chosen Public Defender is now made much more difficult by the officials who appointed him. They have undermined his credibility in this community.

Mr. Tim Donaher, however, is not the target of the outcry; it is the process by which he was chosen. In a blatant exercise of power, the legislative majority overturned the previous process which had corrected a flawed, cronybased system and blessed us with superb public servants. We call for a restoration of that fair process. We also call for respect for the presence of the public in the legislative chambers: we are, after all, their constituents.

I was present at the legislative Public Safety Committee meeting, called at the unseemly hour of 8 a.m. on a January Saturday, where a fence of armed guards was lined up at the rail facing us down. Yes, we noisily objected to the process that was going on, but such defensive tactics were totally unwarranted and unworthy of a society that claims to be democratic. We call on the Monroe County Legislature to amend its ways of conducting the public business.

Sincerely,
M. Gratia L. Esperance, RSM