Gov.-elect Andrew Cuomo has said that Lt. Gov.-elect Robert Duffy will be tasked with the portfolio of ambassador to upstate business and development interests. Certainly, the stability and prosperity of our upstate communities require they have top-notch public safety services.

Duffy, the mayor and former police chief of Rochester, has policed and governed a population that is rapidly approaching 50 percent people of color. There is an intense public discussion in the city about diversity in the municipal work force, especially the police and fire departments.

In a recent op-ed article in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Duffy noted that this is an urgent problem in many municipalities and called for creative responses. One of his most intriguing ideas was creation of a public safety charter school.

There are many reasons why young people of color are not going into the public safety professions. High dropout rates are high on the list. Kids who do well academically have many other career options. Having spent time in our public schools, I’ve observed that there is an animus against law enforcement traceable to decades of the war on drugs and the long-term effect of the mass deportation of young men of color to our prison gulag.

Giving kids the opportunity to spend time in an academic environment in which those aspirations are nurtured is a good idea.

Albany is a choice location for this initiative. It is rich with headquarters of law enforcement agencies, the state’s criminal justice agencies, the courts, legislative committees that make public safety policy, the State Police Academy and Forensic Investigative Center, the Rockefeller College School of Criminal Justice, Albany Law School and many organizations that lobby and advocate in criminal justice field. Where else could young people be exposed to so many aspects of the machinery of justice in the form of internships, summer jobs and the opportunity to meet and interact with leaders in the field?

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Albany

LOAD-DATE: November 30, 2010