

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor's Weekly Radio Message V-Free Initiative to Help Students Prevent Violence

Gov. Christie Whitman provides a weekly radio message to radio stations throughout the state. Each week, the message focuses on a different concern or event of interest to New Jerseyans.

This week the Governor discusses the state's new V-Free initiative. The V-Free initiative announced by the Governor earlier this month, creates a tip line, 1-877-624-8082, for students to call when they are concerned about a potentially dangerous situation. A website, , is also available to provide resource information for students, teachers and parents. In addition, \$75,000 will be made available to help students get involved in the effort to prevent violence.

Attached is a text of the message.

The radio message can be accessed by calling the Governor's actuality line at 609-292-3249. It will be available today, beginning at noon, and will run through the weekend.

Radio Message for September 24 V-Free Youth Initiative

Hello, this is Governor Christie Whitman.

I'm proud to say that with the crime rate at its lowest point in a quarter-century, New Jersey is a safer place than it was when I took office. I'm also pleased that our state's public schools remain among the safest places a young person can be. At the same time, I know the potential for youth violence concerns parents, teachers, and students across New Jersey.

We all have a part to play in preventing youth violence: parents; teachers and administrators; members of law enforcement and government; and young people themselves. And communication is our best weapon.

Parents must talk with their children and, even more important, listen to them. Students must keep open the lines of communication with family, with teachers, and with other students. And we all need to know what to do when youth violence threatens us or our communities.

New Jersey has been working hard to prevent youth violence - whether it's through gun-free school zones, a zero-tolerance-for- weapons policy, or "tip sheets" that help parents and teachers who ask, "what patterns of behavior

should I look for?" and "what should I do when a student shows potentially violent tendencies?"

Now it's time for the next step: empowering young people themselves to create a violence-free atmosphere in their schools and neighborhoods.

Earlier this month, I launched the New Jersey V-Free Youth Initiative. V-Free means violence-free, victimization-free, and vandalism-free. V-Free is a new statewide effort to stop youth violence by placing leadership and responsibility in the hands of our young people.

First, we will encourage students at every school in the state to take a pledge - a pledge to remain v-free.

We will also help young people who have good ideas about starting a v-free program where they live but don't have money for printing, or postage, or running an event.

With the help of a newly formed Youth Coordinating Council, we will award \$75,000 in small youth-leadership grants across the state this year. Students, with help from a teacher or a supervisor, can apply for these mini-grants to carry out violence prevention projects of their own.

We are also maintaining up a V-Free website for students and parents - www.njyouth.com/vfree. There you can apply for a mini- grant, search for violence prevention resources, or read the latest news on youth issues.

Perhaps most important, the V-Free Youth Initiative will promote awareness of a new, toll-free tipline. The tipline will give you a place to turn immediately if you sense imminent danger of violence, for example, if you hear someone say he or she is going to bring a gun to school.

By calling 1-877-624-8082, young people can tell someone in law enforcement confidentially about a dangerous situation in their school or community. This tipline is not meant to replace the ability every young person already possesses to alert a parent, a teacher, or another responsible adult. But if you are young and don't feel comfortable talking about a situation to one of these adults, we always want you to have a place to go.

V-Free is a program, but it's also a challenge to our young people.

Being v-free means being free to express yourself without fear . free to make a difference in your classrooms and your neighborhoods . free to make the most of your time in school. At the same time, to be v-free is to take responsibility for your actions, to communicate with your teachers and parents, to tolerate those who are different from you.

I challenge each young person in New Jersey to be v-free. Explore the website. Take the pledge. Start a program. Get involved. Make v-free your way of life.

Thank you, and have a great week.

