
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“Presentations on how the issue of youth violence
is being identified and addressed in New Jersey”*

LOCATION: Committee Room 6
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: June 21, 1999
9:30 a.m.

MEMBERS OF JOINT COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Robert J. Martin, Chairman
Assemblyman David W. Wolfe, Vice-Chairman
Senator Byron M. Baer
Senator William L. Gormley
Senator Edward T. O'Connor Jr.
Senator Joseph A. Palaia
Senator Ronald L. Rice
Senator Norman M. Robertson
Assemblyman Richard H. Bagger
Assemblyman Joseph Charles Jr.
Assemblyman Joseph V. Doria Jr.
Assemblyman Gerald J. Luongo
Assemblyman Kevin J. O'Toole



ALSO PRESENT:

Melanie M. Schulz, Executive Director
Joint Committee on the Public Schools

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
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ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: I'd like to welcome you all. As you know, this is a very hectic day today. This meeting was scheduled long before other events were forthcoming, but we do plan to begin our hearing (*sic*) on school violence. I do not have an opening statement. I just want to welcome you here. We do have a number of people who have indicated their willingness to testify. If you do have anything you want reproduced or you do want to speak, talk to Melanie Schulz up here.

I'd just like to welcome Assemblyman Charles.

Do you have any comments, Assemblyman? (no response)

Assemblyman Bagger? (negative response)

Assemblyman Luongo?

ASSEMBLYMAN LUONGO: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Byron, do you have anything to say?

SENATOR BAER: What?

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Any comments?

SENATOR BAER: I didn't hear your--

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: I said, "Did you have anything you'd like to say before we get started here?"

SENATOR BAER: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Okay, very good.

The first person who has indicated they're willing to testify is Assembly Majority Leader Paul DiGaetano.

Welcome, Paul.

ASSEMBLYMAN PAUL DiGAETANO: Good morning, Mr. Chairman (*sic*) and members of the Committee. I have with me today Deb Smarth, who was a committee aide for the Assembly Task Force on Adolescent Violence.

I understand the task of your Committee is slightly different in focusing on school violence, but clearly, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, this issue could not be discussed, certainly not adequately, without a full understanding of adolescent violence. And that was evidenced by testimony before our Task Force. And for those of you who've had the opportunity to read our report, it is, clearly throughout the report, interwoven -- school violence with adolescent violence. Clearly, the bulk of adolescent violence is centered for some reason around the schools.

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, this Task Force studied the issue of adolescent violence, at the behest of the Speaker of the Assembly, for the past year. The report, I'm pleased to say, is extremely comprehensive. We have 65 or 70 pages in the report, but more importantly, there are 68 individual recommendations which have been put forth by the Task Force, some of which will require legislation. We have the Office of Legislative Services preparing a number of those issues now for introduction.

I'd like to say to the Committee that there is one overriding theme that was clear throughout the testimony and as we issued in our report. That is that there is no singular agency, no entity, no individual, no center, no single piece of legislation that can solve the problem of adolescent violence. It clearly must be a joint effort of multiples of the above, if you will.

I would not belabor the Committee with the recommendations. As I said earlier, there are 68 of them, but they're bulked into five categories. The school-related violence is the first category. Juvenile justice system recommendations, restorative justice, clergy and spirituality-- Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, I dare say that the Committee ventured a little bit into what some might call unknown or dangerous waters, but it became evident, through our testimony and work, that there is a relationship between preventing adolescent violence and contact with the clergy and spirituality. And finally, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, we could not have studied adolescent violence without getting into the issues of the popular media. We did in detail, but once again it became clear that no single entity, no single group, or individual is responsible for, nor can they solve, the problem of adolescent violence.

And finally, I believe the Joint Committee has our Task Force Report. If not, we can make additional copies available to you. But, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, I think it's clear that while the numbers may look favorable on occurrences of a series of violent acts by adolescents -- when I say favorable, I mean the actual number of occurrences in the state -- it's also become clear that we, in New Jersey, are reflective of national trends. And in that light, Mr. Chair, this is an issue that the Legislature in its entirety, and certainly this Joint Committee, should continue to work on because the trends are not good, as I said a moment ago. While the numbers might look good on their face -- raw numbers, the trends are not good. And clearly, this is an issue that the Legislature should remain focused on.

So I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to be here before the Committee and to present the Committee with the Assembly Task Force Report. And I invite the Committee to review that and critique it as you will. And we would be pleased to work together with this Committee, as would each one of our members of the Task Force. I know Assemblyman Luongo was a member of that Task Force and is on your Committee, Mr. Chair. I think he is a very valuable asset to the Committee.

So with that I will again present the Committee -- Joint Committee with our Task Force Report and wish you God's speed in all your work.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Thank you, Assemblyman.

Any members have questions for the Assemblyman?

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: I have this Task Force document. I'll take a look at it, and I'll take a look at it not only as a Senator, but from my criminal justice background and my work with the Juvenile Commission some years ago.

One of the things that's always bothered me, that this Committee should take a look at, that the Task Force did not-- We really have to seriously revise this notion of "juvenile conferences." They're ineffective, don't work, and don't even participate in Essex County and most cities. I don't think anyone is paying attention. So the question really is, Is there any place in here where the old juvenile court system versus the conference versus some other alternative in dealing with juveniles -- was that ever looked at? Are there recommendations to address it?

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: I think you'll be pleased to read the report, Senator. We could not have completed our work on the Task Force without interacting very seriously with the Administrative Offices of the Courts. And I say that because we could not interact directly with the family court judges, but we have some very interesting testimony -- very interesting information included in here, not testimony from the judges, but information they forwarded to the Committee through the Administrative Office of the Courts. And it's become clear, Senator, and this is one of the recommendations in the report-- It's become clear that we are focusing on juveniles and juvenile justice more on the end game and less on the beginning. And the recommendations of the family courts are that they would have alternatives or that we focus more in the early stages of an adolescent's encounters with the law, if you will.

So the short answer to your question is, yes. And I think you'll find the reading of the report rewarding in that light if that is your particular interest.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: All right, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Any other members? (no response)

Okay, thank you very much.

I will now turn things over to the Chairman, Senator Martin.

Senator, welcome.

SENATOR ROBERT J. MARTIN (Chairman): Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: We're almost done.

SENATOR MARTIN: I appreciate Assemblyman DiGaetano's work.

ssioner of Education, Mr. David Hespe,
to make his statement. I
also been delayed a little bit because of some traffic problems. He is in the car

C O M M I S S I O N

There are no traffic

SENATOR MARTIN: If we didn't have barriers on the Parkway
a few other problems, things would be a lot better in the world. I thin
that's another problem.

COMMISSIONER morning. It's always a privilege
come before this Committee and, certainly, on this issue which is mos
important to us all. My highest priority, as Commissioner of Education, in my
is ensuring that our children have a safe and secure learnin
environment. And it's clear that children cannot learn if they do not feel safe
o to school. And certainly, as a parent, I understand the anxiety
of sending your child to school and having faith tha
at the end of the day safe and happy.

I'm certainly also pleased that the Joint Committee has chosen th
week to hold this hearing. I think it's very fitting that we choose the last few
of the school year to reflect on the events of recent months and t
underscore y
school year and especially the school year beginning in September.

nt events, and the widespread news coverage these event
received, n

environment in which our children feel less secure in the place where they should feel the most secure is, as a State, our highest priority.

I still believe, after all is said and done over the last few months, that our schools here in New Jersey are among the safest places we have for our children. However, since I became Commissioner, I've raised a number of questions and concerns to underscore that. Are our children as safe as they can be in school? Should we be doing more as a State? The Department--

SENATOR MARTIN: Are you going to answer these questions for us?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: I indeed am -- some of them.

SENATOR MARTIN: You got right to the heart of the reason we're having this Committee Meeting.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: That's the reason. And indeed I'm going to make some suggestions, but we should also understand, and I think Assemblyman DiGaetano did an excellent job of pointing out, that there's no one problem, there's no one solution. These are complex societal problems, and they require complex solutions. So sure, I'll have some ideas, but I'm not here to announce that this is the way we address this issue for end-all and be-all.

But we are taking a fresh look at many of the issues, reexamining our strategies. I think as a State and a nation, we must do three things. We need to keep kids with weapons out of our schools. We need to keep children involved with adults in their lives. And we need to keep the community, and community in the greater sense of the word, not just neighborhoods, not just

towns, not just counties, just not states, but the nation as a community involved with our schools.

Now, the Department is tackling this issue from two directions. From the statewide level, we're developing programs which can be used by districts, for example, to coordinate better with law enforcement to establish codes of conduct, and, the second, through our county offices, which are very actively engaged at the county level with local districts, providing assistance and sharing information. I think by focusing at both those levels, both at the statewide level and at the local level, the Department is maximizing its resources and providing the maximum assistance to the schools.

On the State level, we've had quite a number of programs already in place to keep our children safe in school. Our Safe Schools Initiative, for example, contains several important programs to combat school violence. Now, this Initiative includes the law that calls for the automatic removal of children from school if they bring a gun or a weapon. Those children are placed in an alternative learning environment. We also provide school-based counseling programs for students. We have professional development programs for teachers, so they can learn how to deal with troubled students. And UMDNJ, whom I think you'll hear from in a little while, has a very successful program that provides counseling services to schools where incidents have occurred.

There are a number of other actions the Department has taken to address this issue. And I believe we will see the fruits of these initiatives in the months to come. For example, the comprehensive health and physical education component of the new core curriculum standards requires

instruction in ways to defuse violence, promote the physical and emotional well-being of students, and deal with children in a number of social adjustments.

By the end of grade four, children will be taught how to analyze the influence of peers in the media on risk behaviors, injuries, violent behavior; define conflict and demonstrate appropriate nonviolent strategies to resolve it; describe the impact crisis, stress, rejection, separation, and loss can have on them and develop coping strategies for each.

By the end of grade 12, students will be taught how to analyze the causes of conflict within groups, families, and their community. In addition, high school students will be required to demonstrate and evaluate nonviolent strategies to prevent, mediate, and resolve conflicts.

This summer, to supplement our Intervention Referral Services Program for General Education Pupils, the Department will be mailing a four-part videotape series and companion guide to all chief school administrators and county superintendents to show how troubled students can be helped at an early age. The Program, created in 1994, requires all local boards to provide intervention and referral services in every school for pupils who are experiencing difficulties in class but are not in need -- have not been determined in need of special education services. This Program provides a mechanism for teachers, parents, neighbors, and other students to help children exhibiting learning behavior or a health-related problem to seek assistance.

In the future, the Department will also distribute a resource manual that will provide a comprehensive review of issues related to

intervention and referral services, and further recommendations on how to plan, develop, implement, and institutionalize building-based teams.

Early intervention, as you are aware, is the key. So the Department is working with the Violence Institute of New Jersey on information designed specifically for parents and members of the community that will help them identify and get help for children who may be on the verge of harming themselves or others.

While there have been many suggestions of additional steps we can take to minimize the threat of violence in our schools, I believe the first thing we need to do is listen to what educators, parents, the law enforcement community, and students have to say as to what we're doing now about the new initiatives that we've developed and what, in addition, needs to be done. And that's exactly what we're doing. We're finding out exactly what local school districts believe their needs are. This is why the Department, on Friday, held a focus group with those who deal with these issues on a daily basis. It included experts in education, law enforcement, and social services. We wanted to find out from them, those on the front lines, what their needs are. Do we need more counseling programs? Should teachers receive more training on how to deal with troubled children? Is more and greater security the answer? Are more and better laws required? These are the questions that we posed to them on Friday, and we are in the process of compiling their answers. Certainly, we will provide a copy to this Committee in the very near future for your deliberations on this issue.

We received a tremendous amount of useful feedback. But whatever the outcome of our review, the Department will continue to insist that schools be given the tools they need to deal with this very important issue.

The focus group also discussed the system under which incidents of violence, vandalism, and substance abuse are reported to the Department. We are determined to tighten up that system so that we receive more accurate information on the number of violent incidents that occur in school districts. Only with meaningful information -- accurate information -- will it be possible to develop the necessary programs that will provide our children with a safe learning environment.

It's not easy being a child. It's not easy being a teenager. There are so many new pressures. We seem to add to those pressures every year, both internal and external, that our children must face. I'm well aware that if something is disturbing a student, the first instinct is not to discuss it with a teacher, guidance counselor, or parent. Many times when I go out to the schools and I ask the kids, "Who do you go talk to if you have a problem?" very few of them raise their hand and say, "I go to my teacher." "I go to my parent." But clearly that's one of the ways we can get at this issue, try to get a message to them that that's what they should be doing. And that's what I've tried to do, but every teenager thinks they're in control of the situation. They think they can handle their lives without any assistance.

One of the messages I do think we have to get across is that they should contact -- they should let an adult know what they're thinking sometimes. That's a tough message, and I think you'll hear some ways to get at that issue later on, but it is an issue that we need to talk more about. And

certainly, when I go out to the schools, I try to talk about it every time. And a lot of these pressures didn't exist when I was growing up and probably didn't exist when you were growing up. We need to recognize that as well.

As adults and parents, we need to create an environment that fosters communication with our children. If there is a problem, we need to know about it. They should not be afraid to come to us or their counselors or their teachers with their concerns or their problems. Before reacting to eliminate threats to our children, we need to know what those threats are, and then we should be able to act on an individual basis to diffuse the situation.

In closing, let me just say that I recognize that, as Commissioner, I have an obligation to parents to minimize the potential for violence in our schools. And certainly, my commitment to this Committee is that I'll work with you in whatever way you want to assist you in fulfilling your responsibility to do the same to make our schools as safe as they can possibly be.

Thank you, and I will answer any of your questions.

I think most of you know Barbara Anderson, Assistant Commissioner, and John Sherry, Assistant Commissioner. They will be happy to answer your questions as well and help me with some of the answers.

SENATOR MARTIN: I have one question for you, Commissioner. Is there any way to identify those schools that may seem more troubled than others? It seems that looking at Columbine and some of the other nationwide tragedies, it's hard to pinpoint where an incident can occur. That makes us all feel, I think, vulnerable because there is no-- If there were indicators of predictability, one might be able to prepare for it somewhat

better, but it seems as if it's almost random. I was wondering if the Department was aware of any ways in which you could identify a tragedy in waiting.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: What we do know is that these tragedies can happen anywhere. I think it would be very difficult to identify a particular school where it might occur. I think what we can do is to try to provide assistance to students who might be under these pressures and might be vulnerable to acting out in certain ways. That I think we can do. And certainly, our county offices are very much engaged in it, and I'll ask John to discuss it a little bit with the Committee.

Around two months ago, I asked John to survey all our county superintendents to find out what they're doing with their local districts, and I imagined a five-page report coming back. Literally, it was a stack this thick (indicating) of things that the county superintendents were working with, with the local districts to try to get information to everyone because I don't think -- or it would be very difficult to say, "Here, this school has a problem." I do think that what we try to do is make sure that every school has in place some ability to provide services to students who are in need. So I think every school should have certain programs in place. And I think schools that don't have these programs in place, we should focus our attention on. So I guess part of the answer is that, yes, there are districts that we probably want to focus on, those that don't have programs in place, but actually, I think we were pretty pleased with what we got back. And I'll ask John to answer that.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JOHN M. SHERRY:
Thank you, Commissioner.

The county superintendents are in daily contact with the chief school administrators of our state as well as their appropriate staffs. And this has been a trying year for all of us involved in public education.

In the past three months, I asked the county superintendents to share, and they told me that they've been facilitating training within their counties for superintendents, principals, and a number of staffpersons from districts. They meet every month at roundtables with each chief school administrator, and they've had discussions with their roundtables. They've actually set aside time at the roundtable meetings to share what has been going on and what strategies districts have been using to try to get at the solution which is prevention and not making our schools armed camps.

In Atlantic County, they've set up a task force. They've been doing collegial crisis counseling. They've actually sponsored an anti-violence day. In Bergen County, they've redoubled their efforts with the Youth Services Commission. They have a school violence task force. In fact, they're planning a countywide workshop for September. Other counties are doing preparedness workshops, sharing emergency plans among and between districts. We're looking at our recording and reporting requirements and our definitions.

The use of Federal dollars-- This is the time in the academic year when each school district is filing its application for its Federal funds for the next year. Can those Federal dollars be used in a better way to help with preventative activities; making sure that everyone has their sudden violent loss planning information; the development of emergency and management plans, both within the county and working with our State Police; peer meditation; individual counseling; even in one county requesting the assistance of the

family court judges to come in and work with the superintendents? One county reported to me that they actually have a crime stoppers tip line, or hot line, and that they have a Safe Schools tip information number. So the activities that are going on across our state, local people working with county superintendents, county prosecutors, and law enforcement, just impressed me so much and I think the Commissioner also.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: Thank you for allowing us to expand on your question, Senator. I think it was good because it gives you a flavor of what we're doing out in the field.

Thank you.

SENATOR MARTIN: One related question. There was an article, I think, that appeared in the *New York Times* that described the culture of Columbine. That seemed to me -- my limited experience with one New Jersey high school-- The pattern of having jocks sort of rule the school and there might be some outcasts in a sense of those who might be picked on, and so forth, is not something which is isolated. I mean it was (indiscernible) the movie or play *Grease*, which was popular in part because a lot of the stereotypes that were presented there were common and may still be common.

But to the extent to which those groupings -- in Point Pleasant Beach High School, we used to call them cliques -- may actually foster violence on the part of those who are in the less-desirable cliques or involuntarily placed into clicques or left out of the mix-- Has there been any effort to sort of identify this kind of stereotyping and whether it itself breeds danger?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: I'm going to ask Barbara if that came up at all during the focus group. There was a lengthy focus group on Friday,

and I'm sure it's come up prior to that. But you're right, there is a lot of attention being paid to that element.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BARBARA ANDERSON:
Thank you, Commissioner.

You're absolutely right, Senator. These various types of cultures that exist within a school, whether they be groups that isolate themselves or whether there, in the past, had been bias incidents or-- Kids, for whatever reason, want to establish a type of identity. Those types of students and different types of environments within a school have traditionally existed. What's different now is the relationship of those groups to violence.

One of the things that came up on Friday at the focus group for school violence was the fact that violence needs to be defined on a continuum and that solutions need to focus on a much clearer understanding of that continuum and the types of things that are related to it. So I would say to you that, yes, there are a variety of cultures that exist within a school. What we need to do as educators and as personnel who work with school personnel is to understand how these various groups, in fact, relate themselves to violence and be able to address it on a continuum that defines violence and defines solutions related to the type of violence that's exhibited.

SENATOR MARTIN: Questions for the Commissioner?

ASSEMBLYMAN LUONGO: Just a comment.

First of all, I'd like to commend you on what I think is a very comprehensive approach to this. I would detect, being a fellow educator, that we see the school as a microcosm of what's happening. Society and children only role-play what they see, but you're going at the core of behavior

modification. As a principal -- former principal, who believed in behavior modification being the answer, part of that modification is in what you said about the continuing. Learning how the staff can homogenize the school and not permit the fractioning that occurs that permits these isolated situations to occur and therefore placing children at risk-- Your early identification, your peer mediation -- all these things add to the mix, and I agree with all of you.

Unfortunately, the newspaper has said that there was nothing new. There isn't anything new because what's new is that we need to take on the idea of teaching young people how to deal with stress, problems, and conflicts. And we need to set that agenda for them and establish some type of mechanism that permits them to go to someone to address those issues to resolve those conflicts. And I think you're doing a great job. When we say there's nothing new under the sun-- They can't even deal with road rage, and we're dealing with grown adults who cannot control themselves. Why do we expect that a child, who has very little depth in how to deal with problems, can deal with an emotional problem or a personal problem? So we need to modify behavior.

I'm glad to see that's pretty much where you're going. And with Dr. Sherry talking about the various school districts (indiscernible), I say our school district has met in focus groups. We're doing everything possible to make sure that our schools are as safe as humanly possible, and that's all we can ask for. But I'd like to say thank you. You're very comprehensive, Commissioner, and staff.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: Thank you, Assemblyman. It requires attitudinal changes, both in students wanting to reach out to adults

and adults being available and willing to listen. So I think there are attitude changes on both sides of that spectrum, but that is one of our core strategies.

And thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Mr. Chairman.

I would just like to follow up and just ask you to expand on that answer. I know, when you gave your testimony, you indicated in your anecdotal interviews, when you visit the schools, you ask the students, I guess, “Who do you talk to, or who do you trust the most?” And you said parents and teachers, very often, aren’t number one. What kind of response are you getting other than those two?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: It’s difficult-- It was interesting because you can ask them a lot of questions, and they’ll give you answers very quickly. You ask them who they go to when they have a problem, and there is often a lot of silence there because it’s not a reflexive like, “What are you going to read during the summertime?” They’ll shoot out an answer. “How many of you have a summer job?” They’ll spit out an answer. You ask them who they talk to when they have a problem, you don’t get that answer because they’re thinking. I think it’s an issue where we need to get a lot of messages out there. And right now, we’re working through the core curriculum, and that will be -- a lot of good things we’re trying to address through the core curriculum, but we might need to look at some other mechanisms for trying to immediately get a response out of them, “If it’s a serious problem, I’m going to go to an adult.” And whether that’s a counselor or a neighbor or a teacher or a parent, it should be more reflexive than what book they’re going to read.

It should be that they're going to go to an adult, but they're not. I think there are a lot of messages that we need to get out.

SENATOR MARTIN: Senator Robertson.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: I have two areas of questions. Just a thought--

As we talk about the Columbine incident and how profoundly that has affected the country, certainly, it's representative of the issues of alienation and hardening that we see so often. In fact, even in my office, I have a staffer whose parent is on the faculty at Columbine, and that really struck home. But one of the things that I'm concerned about, having grown up in New Jersey and gone through the Paterson school system at a time when there was a tremendous amount of difficulty and violence-- I'm concerned about the extent to which we are assuring students that they will not be the victim of violence. And I agree with the programmatic behavior modification approaches that are being taken, and I know that meeting after meeting after meeting might help to put into place those things that will be helpful in the long run. How do we, however, assure a child that they're not going to be beaten up that day? How do we assure a child that they're not going to be victimized by a weapon of some kind, whether it's a gun or a knife or a box cutter? What do we say to those kids who are afraid to go to school, especially in urban areas where levels of crime may be higher generally?

We're not just talking about a question of alienation. The alienation there is so profound from the mainstream that we're in pitch battle really. We're in a crisis situation, and we know that education isn't going on in the way that it should. And I know that there are a couple of

recommendations in the Assembly Task Force Report, and it is a very good report from what I can see so far, that talks about circumstances upon which removal is done.

I remember when I grew up in the city of Paterson. There was School 22. And if you were disruptive enough, you didn't stay in your public school, you went to some alternative. What is the thinking there? What is being done, currently, to develop alternatives to assure children immediately of safety?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: There are really, I think, three initiatives we're doing on that side of the equation. You're right. There are whole different parts that are coming together. I think behavior is one, but there are also other parts of it. And we have distributed a Code of Conduct, which all schools should have, as to setting out exactly the circumstances. There is a school search manual which the Attorney General has put out in conjunction with the schools, to provide information to the schools on how to conduct searches exactly. There is a memorandum--

SENATOR ROBERTSON: By the time they get done reading this, however--

COMMISSIONER HESPE: But they do. The administrators do read it cover to cover.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: I know.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: They need to, and they do.

There is a Memorandum of Understanding between law enforcement and the schools to depict areas of cooperation and coordination to make sure that information is shared and that protocols are established so

that when incidents occur they're handled professionally and thoroughly. So there are many pieces of that side of the equation which are in existence now that are being distributed now. I think a memorandum of understanding was announced.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: What is the latest-- And I realize that a lot of that is designed to answer questions in due process and to be fair and whatnot. What is the latest thinking with respect to how desirable or undesirable it is to separate disruptive and violent students from the remainder of the student population who live in fear?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: We have, under our Safe Schools Initiative, alternative schools, which are set up to accomplish just that, to remove students who have substance abuse or have exhibited violence and move them into an alternative school setting out of the neighborhood school which they might be in.

I will just ask Barbara to elaborate on that for a second.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: How many of them are there?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ANDERSON: We have a statewide network of alternative schools. We started out with one in every county. Some counties have, in fact, decided to have the alternative school within the district. Some counties have them both within the district and within the county. For urban areas, we have, within the *Abbott* districts, required as a part of that that there be an alternative education program and/or school at both the middle and the high school level.

The Safe Schools Initiative began with one of the considerations being that we would give educators more tools to be able to respond when

there were either violent or disruptive students in the educational program to immediately remove them to make the environment safe and conducive to learning to those children who came to school to learn as well as to try to provide, where possible, an alternative learning environment for those students who may not be successful in the traditional learning environment.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: And so, for instance, in the city of Paterson, which is a State-run system, is there an alternative school currently?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ANDERSON: Yes, and they will be expanding that under the *Abbott* decision to ensure that they have at least one at the middle school level and at least one at the secondary level.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: And what is there currently?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ANDERSON: I believe they have at least one at the secondary level, and they may have more.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: Oh, okay. And you don't know how many places by any chance?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ANDERSON: No, I don't.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: We can get that information for you, Senator.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: Okay, if you would.

The other area of questioning, as a notation-- I remember I had served on the Governor's Council on Urban Economic Development. And these sorts of quality-of-life issues came up, including the importance of education. But one of the things that we talked about and we have since seen proven itself out in deadly form in other parts of the country, whether it's Los Angeles or New York, is the link between the onset of graffiti as being a real

problem developing into gang violence. Many, many gangs that, ultimately, are full-blown gangs start out as those gangs that are oriented around graffiti, and so forth. And yet I know, especially in the urban areas, there is a real battle between those who would-- And I'm not just talking about graffiti as a simple defacement, but we're talking about serious vandalism having grown out of graffiti -- gangs, gang violence, ultimately well-armed gang violence.

Is there anything special being done to recognize that link, or do you think that link actually exists?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: I think that's one of the desired outcomes of this Memorandum of Understanding between the schools and law enforcement, to share exactly that sort of information as to who is being -- who's involved in the community in certain criminal conduct and who might be enrolled in the schools.

I do know that the Attorney General's Office, through a couple of initiatives, is addressing those juvenile crime issues. It would certainly be a good question for the Attorney General, or if he doesn't-- I will certainly follow up and get that information of the programs in place on the law enforcement side to address that.

In terms of the impact on the schools, certainly schools aren't on an island in the community. The schools are a continuum of what happens in the community. And I think that's the whole purpose of the Memorandum²⁶, for our (indiscernible) to reflect the need for information to flow between all the community entities.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: But to what extent, if any, is there a zero tolerance for vandalism, graffiti, and things of that nature?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: In the schools?

SENATOR ROBERTSON: Yes.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: I think that the policies vary.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER SHERRY: It's a local policy issue, but I can share with you, interacting with many of our chief school administrators across the state, that they intend to take swift action both to remove the signs of the graffiti as well as to implement the Code of Conduct properly in terms of beating out justice to students who might be involved in such activity. It happens unfortunately. We shouldn't tolerate it. We should let people know that it is unacceptable behavior.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: Well -- and jumping on it quickly.

We had the situation in Passaic County, when I served as Freeholder-- On county bridges and county-owned property we did have a zero tolerance situation where it was removed the instant it went up. And even on the bridge-- I can recall a bridge that came from -- a public high school and various parts around the bridge had been subject to graffiti. We jumped on it every time it was there, and it just stopped, with respect to the bridge. But the idea isn't so much the notion of just graffiti as that were the be-all and end-all. It isn't. But the point is that it has shown itself over a period of time in other cities to escalate into a situation that becomes truly unmanageable.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MARTIN: Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I kind of concur with my colleagues in some of the things that all of you are saying, but I guess my background indicates to me that we don't go

far enough with looking at (indiscernible) and the real problem. I have no disagreement that some of the elements that create this violent society in which we have young people within the community as well as within the academic arena-- It's related to a lot of different things, and stress is one of them.

But I think we missed the boat if we think that young people's lives are so confused at home and elsewhere that the majority of them that commit violence in our schools and elsewhere-- It's a stress problem. Most of this stuff, whether we like to accept it or not, is learned behaviors. It is just that simple. And there's more than enough research, that many of us have reviewed over the years from our academic perspective, as well as for other reasons, to show that you're going to always have the juvenile justice system in society's subculture groups where our young people don't totally deviate too far from the social norms, but they tend to have their own set of rules within those groups. Some of those rules are harmful to society, and some of those rules are not, and you can live with them. Until we start to look at young subgroups -- subculture groups that way, we're not going to really get to the kind of solutions we need. That's number one.

Number two, the State of New Jersey is a very large state -- 566 municipalities. And my little thing is that between those different school districts-- And I guess what appalls me the most in the Legislature, and I've been here going on 14 years, is that all of us have something to bring to the table that's common in relationship to New Jersey and its needs and its people, but some things are very unique.

I supported making a law -- and I was very offended when it came up because I argued that case for Megan, even though it wasn't Megan. For

many, many years, no one paid attention until it occurred in a certain community or a certain group.

We talk about Colorado. Well, Colorado is an unusual situation. We've been talking about school violence for years, but now, all of a sudden, people want to focus on this piece. Now, my concern is that we're going to focus on it as New Jersey as a whole, at least conceptually, and really neglect those urban communities and those suburban communities that border urban communities that Senator Robertson-- And I'm raising that, primarily, because I just don't believe that that school-- (remainder of comment indiscernible) I'm very much concerned about the interaction of young people outside of school and after school because that's where a lot of this behavior is learned.

And I will be talking to Senator Martin because, Senator, you and I agreed and the Commission agreed--

You know, young people have to release energies. It has nothing to do with stress. Now, how they release those energies and what influences they get are something else. It has an impact on all of us. But when you have urban playgrounds closed and the State disagrees with identifying means to open those playgrounds that we for year after year have been complaining about, personally I, my constituency base, and others have a problem with that, particularly when you can go across your borders to a nice suburban community and the playgrounds are opened and there are other activities. So once you go across that line of demarcation into another community, you start to set the stage for social norms to change based on perception of (indiscernible), reality in some cases, which is thrown back into the school system.

And even in this state, when you put a bill in and say, "Look, just pass my bill. We'll pay for after-school recreation. Just give us permission to do so," and the State stymies me, then it tells me we're going to always have problems because when we put the initial bill in, and the reason I'm taking the time to say this, I learned something. I said, "Well, who will be opposed to after-school recreation?" Well, there was a lot of opposition from educators, which shocked me because that's who was in my playground. My gym teacher was the guy who took care of me. So I had the peer group and the counseling I needed, but I also -- the school system also had signals that something was occurring because we were constantly monitored, not just by community people, but by academic folk we had seen every day.

When the school board opposed the bill for after-school recreation -- I've been fighting this over 10 years -- I went to the school board meeting and told them what I thought about it. The lady who was lobbying told me something very interesting. She said, "You know, in Lavallette, New Jersey, we don't want the playgrounds open." I said, "Why would you not want the playgrounds open?" She said, "Because we have so many after-school activities that we're trying to get them to participate. We don't need the playgrounds open." I say, "Fine. We don't have that. We don't have clean parks. To debate over urban dollars for parks -- we don't have it."

And the reason I'm raising this, Commissioner, is because my question to you is whether or not you feel that some of this violence within the school system and some of the attention we need to focus on in having young people connect to adults who are responsible-- Do you not believe that that should happen after school as well as in school? And do you not believe that

there is a direct relationship to after-school programs within the academic structure? We're paying the taxes anyway. Isn't that in relationship to all this in your opinion? If it's not, then I will be real concerned about where we're going with juvenile violence in and outside the school.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: You said a whole bunch of things there, Senator. Let me start at the beginning.

First, in terms of my reference to the confusion and anxiety of adolescents, I wasn't referring to causative factors. Causation is an entirely different story -- very complex. I was just referring to that-- It becomes difficult at times for them to sort through who to go to, so please don't-- It was probably that my communication of that was not as accurate as I should have been. Please don't take that as a causation comment as much as it was an aggravating -- one of the problems that we need to address comments.

Second, I think our responses have not been solely related to events of the recent months. Dating back to 1994, we developed these alternative school programs, so we've been actively involved for many years because this has been an issue. When Barbara was referring to -- and getting directly to your question-- When Barbara was referring to that continuum of events requiring a continuum of solutions, there are -- you have Columbine-type events and you have other kids bringing guns to school in their knapsacks or a knife or something like that. And those all require different solutions. And I think that's what came out, and that's what we're trying to develop, a continuum of solutions for this continuum of problems.

But, as to after-school programs, one of the things that is part of the *Abbott* reforms, so to speak, are after-school programs. I will just ask Barbara to mention just a little bit of our thoughts on that.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ANDERSON: Thank you, Commissioner.

As the Commissioner indicated, I think it's after-school programs and a variety of other type of programs that we think can be used effectively as long as we identify for what purpose and as long-- And we believe we should be partnering with municipalities and other State agencies -- community agencies to try to, wherever possible, work together to offer these types of programs. I think sometimes what gets confusing is the purpose for which those programs are, in fact, instituted. We believe, for social supports, they can, in fact, be effective. Whether or not there are academic benefits is something that research has not yet shown has a direct benefit. Again that's not to say they don't have value. We support and fund neighborhood community service centers. The purpose for which we do that is to try to provide those supports that schools don't provide. So I think it's a matter of working with our partners, health and social service agencies, community agencies, so we don't duplicate existing programs. And it's also a matter of defining and being clear as to what purpose and function we want those programs to serve.

SENATOR RICE: Let me end on this, Mr. Chairman. This issue is too dear to me, and I can assure you--

SENATOR MARTIN: We want to-- We're under time constraints. We've got two other Commissioners and--

SENATOR RICE: Fine. I took the time to come down here to be with them, so just give me 30 seconds. I'd appreciate it, okay? We pay them, too. And we get elected to talk.

Let me just indicate, in closing, this note. Let's reidentify causation because it's going to be different. Let's just totally input. Suddenly I don't believe the State's (indiscernible) them money, but there are things we can do locally. Cities like Newark, when you go to the street corners-- I'd like to see the Commissioner walk the street on a regular basis in urban areas. We'll give you protection if you feel unsafe. Talk to young people. "Why are you not in school? And what are some of the things you're upset about?" And all you hear is, "Why aren't the playgrounds open?" We don't open playgrounds, and we don't have organized recreation for academic participation where it should be. That's what I'm saying.

So I don't want to hear the cop-out, "Well, we don't want to duplicate." We're not talking about duplicating. We can't build new facilities. We have all those facilities in-- (remainder of comment indiscernible) We'll have more discussion on it, and I'll talk to the Chairman about moving my bill also because we're willing to pay as poor as we are in our city, but then our city doesn't benefit most of the kids. The sports complex is not going to benefit most of the kids, and those kinds of initiatives are good to help supplement a whole community, but that's not what young people are saying.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: When we meet, Senator, we can add that to the agenda.

SENATOR MARTIN: Senator Baer.

SENATOR BAER: Thank you.

Recognizing, as everybody has pointed out, how complex this is and aside from the complexity of solutions, there's quite a complexity of problems and even definition breaking violence down in the many different types of violence from the Columbine type to other types.

My first question -- I have only two -- has to do with whether you feel that one of the many aspects that needs to be recognized is the existence, where it exists, of situations where substantial percentages of youngsters in school are looking forward to not very much opportunity in terms of when they come out of school. This question that has been raised from time to time that relates to what some people describe as schools that are failing -- other people describe as unusual concentration of youngsters that are failing.

Do you see that as one of the many correlates to this problem?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: I think as you look at this continuum of incidents with the tragedy at Columbine -- one extreme. There are other incidents throughout-- Each one of those can have different causal implications and different solutions. And I think I would not say that that is not one of the reasons, perhaps -- is the despair at certain age levels. But again there is this continuum, and I think each one has different causations, perhaps, and each one might have different solutions. We're recognizing that, and we're going to try to address this issue as a continuum, not as everything -- here's what we're looking at here. It's one thing, and here are the solutions for that. It's going to be different things with different solutions.

SENATOR BAER: Right, and relate to different forms of violence.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: Yes.

SENATOR BAER: Now, because of the complexity and multifaceted aspect of this and the difficulty often of getting official action to deal with 65 points or 100 points or whatever when sometimes it's very difficult to get focus on the 3-point agenda, how would you suggest that this be dealt with, either in terms of priorities that will focus on more narrowly or in terms of creating some sort of structure to give us a better chance of implementing such a complex number of interrelated items?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: That's what we're trying to address it both that -- using the Department's resources -- that both the statewide level to provide assistance through things like a Memorandum of Understanding, Codes of Conduct, alternative schools, and also at the local level, through the assistance of our county offices, working with all the districts at that level. And I think that's the framework that will allow us to take account of certain commonalities but also the local nature of a lot of the problems. So I think that's the framework we've set up, and that's the framework through which we're going to try to address some of these issues.

SENATOR BAER: Excuse me. You answered that, I think, pretty much in terms of the initiatives that the Department can take.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: Yes.

SENATOR BAER: I assume that under existing statutory situations.

Would you expand your answer in terms of priorities and complexity to where an initiative is necessary for others, whether it's the Legislature or whether it's other entities that -- or local boards, or whatever,

that have a number of items and that they need to keep in mind in dealing with the complexities of this?

COMMISSIONER HESPE: I think, over the last month or so, it has become very obvious that there are a lot of entities working on this, certainly, the Legislature, Assemblyman DiGaetano's Task Force, the local district level, the Attorney General's Office, the Violence Institute -- all of which are looking at these issues and developing solutions. And I'm pretty comfortable saying together we're developing these solutions and throughout the administration, throughout the schools, and the communities with law enforcement. And I do think there is a comprehensive effort to try to look at this in a number of different ways. I think the Joint Committee is a very good vehicle for that. And the Assembly Task Force Report was another good vehicle at the statewide level.

SENATOR BAER: I won't prolong this bit. I would invite you, relative to these reports and relative to your answer, if you wanted to send the Committee your thoughts in terms of any particular ones of these recommendations -- these very, very many recommendations which go in many directions -- your thoughts in terms of those that you think those of us in this Committee and the Legislature need to focus on and prioritize so far as our own responsibility.

COMMISSIONER HESPE: We certainly will, Senator.

SENATOR MARTIN: Thank you.

That's a good segue. We're going to ask the Attorney General, if he will, to make a presentation.

We're under some time constraints. When we set this Committee meeting up, just so everybody knows, there were no other morning activities going on in the State House. Now we're inundated with lots of business which is important, but so is this Committee. In the interest of time, to be able to hear the witnesses-- We can talk among ourselves in terms of solutions. I'm going to just ask to receive testimony from the witnesses so that we at least get their information.

Letting Attorney General Farmer off the hook knowing he will not be questioned, we still hope that you would anticipate what questions we might have asked and presented.

I'm sure that you're well aware that the focus of this meeting is to try to make sure that New Jersey schools are as safe as they possibly can be, preventing serious violence but also violence of any nature. And we know that your Office has had a preemptive policy, which has been put in place. We leave it to you to explain that further.

A T T O R N E Y G E N E R A L J O H N J . F A R M E R J R .:
Thank you, Senator Martin. It is a pleasure to come before you today in my new capacity. I look forward to working with all the members of this Committee in the future, as we have in the past, to address the pressing issues of our times.

Of the myriad issues on which I have been briefed on in the last couple of weeks since assuming the role of Attorney General, certainly none is more important than the issue of youth violence and particularly as it threatens our schools.

I'm going to begin by stating the obvious. Once an incident occurs, as events in Colorado have so clearly illustrated, it's too late. Too often law enforcement is left to pick up the pieces of shattered lives to meet our punishment when no punishment can possibly address the dimensions of a tragedy that's been inflicted. So, appropriately, the focus in this state has been on efforts to prevent violence and to deter violence.

As you all know, New Jersey is considered a national leader in the campaign against school violence. On the day after the shootings in Littleton, Governor Bill Owens of Colorado called Governor Whitman for guidance on how to prevent such a tragedy from occurring again. The programs I will discuss today include resources Governor Whitman shared with Governor Owens.

The Education and Law Enforcement Working Group has been meeting monthly for the past 12 years. And while the original focus of that group was drugs in schools, it has shifted to include violence in the schools. As you are aware, this group consists of State, county, and local law enforcement officers and representatives from numerous education groups. The Working Group meets to produce models and materials to address issues such as youth violence and school safety.

The Group recently produced the revised Memorandum of Agreement between my Department and the Department of Education, on which you heard Commissioner Hespe speak. This venture was released just this month and will be implemented and signed by all prosecutors and school superintendents this summer. The Memorandum of Agreement requires school and law enforcement officials to meet and work together at both the

State and local level to devise realistic and effective anti-drug and violence safety policies. The Memo of Agreement creates a reciprocal obligation between school and law enforcement officials to share relevant information when incidents that may threaten the safety of the community at large arise.

A significant aspect of this Memo of Agreement is that officials will alert each other about incidents that involve planned or threatened violence by students. Police and prosecutors will be required to respond promptly to any information provided by school officials concerning the planned or threatened violence. This practice will help avert crises before it's too late. The Memo of Agreement will aid law enforcement and education officials in their efforts to develop plans specific to their schools' and communities' needs. For example, the Memo requires discussion of the need to develop plans to address potential crises such as bomb threats, armed assailants, and hostage situations, as well as hate crimes and bias-related acts.

The Working Group also produced the *New Jersey School Search Policy Manual* and the shorter, easy-to-use *School Search Checklist*, which I have here, Senator Robertson.

SENATOR GORMLEY: Do you have the shorter one?

ATTORNEY GENERAL FARMER: This is the shorter one.

SENATOR GORMLEY: We wanted to be challenged over the weekend.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: This is actually very, very good though.

SENATOR GORMLEY: It really is.

ATTORNEY GENERAL FARMER: The shorter version is about 50 pages.

SENATOR GORMLEY: Oh, well, thank you so much.

SENATOR MARTIN: For those of you who haven't seen it, they're referring to approximately a 300-page manual, *School Search Policy Manual*.

ATTORNEY GENERAL FARMER: New Jersey was the first state to produce a comprehensive school search policy manual. And since its creation, it has become a national model. Copies go to every school and police department in the state. In the near future, all schools will receive the manual on CD-ROM.

The *Manual* provides instructions on a wide range of search and seizure subjects, some of which include random locker searches, the appropriate use of metal detectors, drug testing of students suspected of being under the influence, and working with the local police departments in using drug detection dogs. Not only is this a comprehensive manual for school officials, it is our hope that its strong anticrime policies will deter students from bringing drugs and weapons onto school property.

An essential component of community policing throughout the state is the New Jersey Guide to Establishing Safe Schools Resource Officers Program. This Program serves as a how-to guide for starting school-based policing programs. The Program is predicated upon the recognition that the presence of a uniformed police officer in a school can be a strong deterrent in fighting drug use and sales and other forms of criminal behavior by students.

I am also proud that the Department of Law and Public Safety is an active participant in national programs addressing youth violence. This state's Attorney General served as national cochair of the National Association of Attorneys General Youth Safety and School Violence Task Force, and I look forward to following his efforts and taking on a leadership role in the efforts of government officials nationwide to address issues in this area.

One national program with which the Department has been involved in is the Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation and Leadership Program. This Program provides training to children to mediate disputes between other children as an alternative to direct discipline or interaction with a school principal. The Program also provides training to those children who are seen as natural leaders, encouraging them to be effective peer leaders by providing positive messages and setting examples of acceptable behavior, which help ensure a measure of prevention against violence.

We also participated in the national initiative by the National Association of Attorneys General and the National School Boards Association to create a joint Web site. The Web site, which is updated each month, provides safety tips for parents, teachers, and school officials, and it serves as a clearinghouse for successful school safety plans and resources.

Finally, in announcing a package of programs to address youth violence last fall, Governor Whitman noted her support for the concept of early intervention, that is, identifying warning signs to head off youth violence before it actually occurs. Following the Governor's lead, the Department of Law and Public Safety has, under development, an initiative to address this issue. This initiative is to enhance the currently available intervention

programs for schools and parents who are concerned about their children's safety. Our goal is to provide parents and schools with effective assistance in resolving violent or potentially violent situations.

In sum, our focus is prevention. We have encouraged early intervention, clear rules to government intervention, peer leadership, and police presence in schools. It is important to confront this issue head-on by bringing in all available resources and maintaining a cooperative, coordinated effort with each branch of government to prevent violence.

As chief law enforcement officer for this state, I pledge to continue our cooperative efforts with the Judiciary, Legislature, other Departments of State government, school and law enforcement officials to work for the paramount goal of ensuring our children's safety, both at school and at home.

Thank you.

SENATOR MARTIN: Thank you, General.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: Just to let you know, General, I did review, briefly, the *Manual*. And actually, this is very, very well done, in my opinion. It answers any questions that might arise. And I congratulate you and the administration for the degree to which you're working within the two Departments because it is very, very important.

And in passing, I also want to echo something that Senator Rice said before. That is that separate and apart from the higher profile sorts of violence that we're seeing, whether it's Columbine or any other suburban setting, garden variety violence has been occurring in higher crime -- in schools in higher-crime neighborhoods for many, many years. And again I will also be

very concerned about the extent to which you were able to assure the victims of potential violence that they will, in fact, be safe.

Thank you.

SENATOR MARTIN: Thank you.

SENATOR BAER: Could you, in addition to the other materials, provide us with a copy of the statement you just presented.

ATTORNEY GENERAL FARMER: Absolutely.

SENATOR MARTIN: Next we have Secretary of State DeForest, better known as Buster, Soaries.

How do you prefer to be addressed in your capacity -- Mr. Secretary, Reverend Soaries, Buster? How do we deal with your eminence?

SENATOR RICE: Ron's friend.

SECRETARY REVEREND DEFOREST B. SOARIES JR.:
It depends on who you are, Senator.

SENATOR MARTIN: I'll call you Reverend.

SECRETARY SOARIES: It doesn't matter. My staff calls me Secretary because I think I'm in charge of their evaluation.

SENATOR MARTIN: You are here to speak on the new Center for Youth Policy.

SECRETARY SOARIES: What's being distributed is a document that heretofore has been internal to my Department, and I'll give you the background and the summary of the contents in my statement.

First of all, thank you for the opportunity to come to speak.

This is Emilio Fandino, who is the Director of Programs for the Department of State. And this is Adrienne Gillespie, who is the Director for the newly established Center for Youth Policy and Programs.

Again thank you for the opportunity to be here to share this time with you to discuss a very important subject.

As many of you may know, I've spent a good time of my adult life working on issues that affect young people, including violence, and I brought that commitment with me to the Department of State. One of the goals that I hope to achieve during my tenure with State government is to help create mechanisms that will maximize and effectively coordinate the efforts that the government expends on behalf of youth. There is certainly a need for all sectors to develop strategies that take comprehensive approaches to the issue, as you've heard already and have already concurred.

The issue of youth violence, and school violence in particular, is a comprehensive issue. And when we examine youth violence, we do so in conjunction with all other relevant youth problem areas since one or more of them might be a potential contributing factor to the problem at hand. When we talk about school violence, we know that that is an extension of violence in the community. All of the school violence issues I've been involved with, personally, have been an overflow of conflict that has occurred between young people in a nonschool environment.

To that end, with the direction and support of the Governor, we in the Department of State have established the Center for Youth Policy and Programs. The Governor approved this concept in March. She announced its formation at the Governor's Conference for Youth and Families in Atlantic

City in April. And the need for the Center really arose out of the fact that there were myriad youth programs at the State and county and municipal level as well as the nonprofit youth-serving sector. And there appeared to be a less than desired level of cooperation and coordination among these various initiatives.

In State government alone, we have various youth-related programs, many of which you've heard about from my colleagues in the cabinet and others that are spread throughout various Departments. There is no effective mechanism in place to ensure coordination and cooperation between these various initiatives.

If you look deeply into what is happening between State resources and young people, you'll notice that there is, in fact, some level of predictability as it relates to youth violence, but that predictability is not being coordinated by corresponding resources. As an example, we know that there is a high coorealtion between foster care and juvenile crime, but there is very little coordination, collaboration, or even discussion between the Division of Youth and Family Services and the Juvenile Justice Commission. And if a child is involved in one of these various systems, what you notice is that a parent of a child or community agency serving that child has to call a number of different sources to get help for that child. And so if a child is in foster care, the Division of Youth and Family Services is the source; if a child commits a crime, then it's the Juvenile Justice Commission; if a child drops out of school, it may be the Department of Education; if a child is unemployed, it's the Labor Department; if a child is on drugs, it's the Health Department; if a child is homeless, it's the Department of Community Affairs; if a child is involved in

the court system, it's the Administrative Office of the Courts; and if a child is in need of recreation, as Senator Rice has noted, it's really the Department of Environmental Protection. And so what we have, in essence, is a fragmented approach to organizing State resources that are aimed at and in service to young people. And then that is exacerbated by the fact that the public is generally unaware of the availability of these services, and thus there is a need to have a centralized point of access where people can be directed or referred according to their particular needs.

Thus, the Center for Youth Policy and Programs will act as a State-level clearinghouse for all youth programs and initiatives throughout State government. The objective, of course, is not to direct or control or supplant these activities, but to use this new facility to enhance the impact of existing programs on youth by serving as a facilitator that will enable these programs to interact more effectively with each other and the population that they serve.

In line with this mission, the Center will also serve as a principal point of access for any person or organization seeking information about youth programs or issues. One of our weaknesses in State government is that we have very few points of central access that people can call and thereby have an immediate response on a comprehensive level.

We see this Center as being active in four major areas: information, advocacy, prevention, and intervention. In the area of information, the Center will compile a comprehensive database of all existing youth programs in New Jersey, both private and public. This information will be available to the public via a special call center and Web page. For instance, we would like the same parent who is looking for a soccer league for his or

child to be able to get that information from the same Web site or phone number that the parent looking for psychiatric services will get their information from so that New Jersey has a one-stop shop information database for people wondering what to do with or for young people.

The Center's advocacy role will include conducting research on youth issues including violence, making recommendations on policy to the Governor and to the Legislature, initiating dialog among youth groups and conducting seminars and conferences. Also as an advocate, the Center will be able to broker relationships between resources that are available to youth from the private sector and youth serving organizations. A part of such advocacy will be what we normally call best practices where we identify the organizations in the state that do the best work at various youth initiatives, youth entrepreneurship training, after school activities, youth recreation models, and then allow those agencies, with State support, to be replicated around the state because we are able to bring people together from diverse parts of the state to be taught in the strategies of that best practice agency. And then the area of prevention will take the form of education initiatives implemented through schools, organizations, and other entities. Additionally, the Center will take on the role of intervention by serving by a resource to resolve conflict among groups or individuals and to promote mediation and conflict resolution programs.

In essence, this Center is responding to the need to have more coherence and cooperation among agencies supported by State dollars aimed at assisting and serving young people.

Finally, the Center will form advisory boards and councils that involve young people themselves and that also bring together various youth councils. In the state, the Governor has a Youth Advisory Council. The Labor Department is forming youth advisory councils. And we have a fragmented approach to involving young people in State government.

In performing these functions, the Center will work with all types of organizations, but obviously we will look to our public schools as logical and principal partners to help us implement some of our information and educational initiatives. Similarly, since many existing successful programs are school based, the Center will look closely at these initiatives so that they can be used as models to be replicated in other places.

I'm therefore delighted to begin this dialog, and I look forward to working with the Legislature in assisting you in implementing your concern about youth violence.

SENATOR MARTIN: Thank you, so much, Mr. Secretary. It's an exciting concept. Let's hope it does what it's intending. I think what you said, the cooperation and the coordination, is desperately needed for these programs. I didn't realize how many Departments were all involved with youth who may have problems.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: Mr. Chairman, I know you don't want us to speak, but it is no good unless I, at least, mention something to the Secretary through you.

I'm looking at your report, and certainly, I concur with you 100 percent. We've had these discussions year after year. I'm glad to see someone

in position who understands and can do something about it, but there is the concern, legislatively-- All the folk that come together in the State Government Task Force are going to be participants within government and have to touch, I guess, society one way or the other. I really think that needs to be revised because, when I see task forces like this, we have to determine where the monies are coming and if the dollars are needed. We have to determine if there is a change of law, but we're never participants. I don't like going to a committee to participate or not going to a committee where something (indiscernible) go through, and then the committee comes out and says, "This is where we're going," and expect me to rubber-stamp it.

It's the kind of task force (indiscernible) actually like to be in on if I can get the Senate President or somebody to do that. So I really think you need to look at having both Houses and both parties as participants on the task force since it's going to be oversights. If it's just administrative, it's a one-way street. And if it's a one-way street, it could be the best thing in the world.

SECRETARY SOARIES: We are currently, Senator, working with Senator Martin and a cosponsor to adapt this concept into legislative form. And that process will give both Houses an opportunity to have input in the final shape of this, which is why we haven't done much public discussion and which is why that document is confidential interim to my Department. Our legislative initiative that corresponds to this, which has, by the way, the same name, is moving through the legislative process now to ensure that there is legislative participation in this project.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Through you, Mr. Chairman, whatever it is that comes out of this, I would like to cosponsor it with you. I don't know if it would have good relationships due to process of 566 municipalities and the kind of organizations that are going to make a difference.

Excuse me, Madam, did you hear that? Could you relay it to the Chairman because he is not paying attention. I know what's going to happen when it comes through, we'll be fighting.

SENATOR MARTIN: I'm sorry. We're just doing our own coordination.

SENATOR RICE: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I was just relaying that when this initiative comes in legislative form, I would like to cosponsor it with you so that we can send a bipartisan message to our suburban-urban districts that we are thinking alike. I would appreciate it if you would allow me to do that.

SENATOR MARTIN: I would be happy to, Senator.

ASSEMBLYMAN DORIA: Can I just get a--

SENATOR MARTIN: Yes, Assemblyman Doria.

ASSEMBLYMAN DORIA: Just one clarification. Is this Center already established, or are you waiting for legislation to establish it?

SECRETARY SOARIES: No, it was established administratively, but there is--

ASSEMBLYMAN DORIA: So it does exist?

SECRETARY SOARIES: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN DORIA: So what you're doing now is then trying to--

SECRETARY SOARIES: Expanding on the scope of the Center so that it does, in fact, meet the intent of Senator Rice. And that is to have legislative involvement and input.

Senator Allen had proposed an Office of Youth Advocacy that really addressed many of the same issues that the Governor's intent for the Center for Youth Policy proposed. What we've done is met with Senator Allen and some of her colleagues to bring the two initiatives together so that all of her concerns and the Governor's concerns show up at the same place at the same time.

ASSEMBLYMAN DORIA: So this Center, that has been created already, will be subsumed into the new structure that is created by the legislation.

SECRETARY SOARIES: Exactly.

SENATOR MARTIN: That helps clarify.

Thank you again.

SECRETARY SOARIES: Thank you.

SENATOR MARTIN: Dr. Michael Greene, Executive Director of the Violence Institute of New Jersey at UMDNJ.

M I C H A E L B. G R E E N E, Ph.D.: I have 10 copies of my testimony.

SENATOR MARTIN: Is anybody here for the next meeting? There is a meeting coming in here. Is anyone here on that? (no response) Our sense is that we're--

DR. GREENE: Good morning.

Thank you, Senator and Committee members.

My name is Michael Greene. I am the Executive Director of the Violence Institute of New Jersey at UMDNJ. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today about violence in our schools. As many of you know, the Violence Institute convened a Youth Summit on Violence on May 17 of this year. We brought together 400 high school students from every county in New Jersey to discuss among themselves the key issues underlying youth violence and to present their recommendations to State and Federal policy makers.

What I want to do today is to articulate three fundamental principles that I think need to be addressed to make our schools safe and healthy communities. After stating each of the principles, I will quote some of the related statements and recommendations made by the young people at the Summit. These are drawn from the transcriptions of the summary statements that were presented to the policy makers. I will then present recommendations that flow from each of the principles as well as the recommendations made by our students.

First principle. Adolescents, more than anything, want and need someone to talk with in a supportive and empathic manner about their interests, their experiences, their life goals, and their concerns including, but not limited to, their concerns about violence. They need adults to listen to them, and they need to have peers available to speak with them either in groups or individually.

Related comments from the students, and these are exact quotes.

“We have counselors that are not supposed to get personal because they don’t want to get too into the situation. But we need counselors that can

empathize with what we are doing and people that know what we are going through. They just need to know what we are doing. And also, we have seminars, but these seminars -- the officials that come and speak to us, come with their name badges and their suits on or their dresses, and they talk to us and just lecture, and they are not there to actually listen to and understand what we're going through."

"Principals and teachers do matter. They do make a difference. They need to start paying more attention and set limits. They also need to be available and talk. And when they are available, they need to be non-judgmental. And they need to not preach because we don't want to hear any preaching. They should be taught some counseling skills so they may be better skilled to help us with our academics."

"We also want peer counselors because most kids go to their friends to talk, and they prefer to talk to teenagers, peers, people their own age, and they don't want to go to adults and talk. So what we need to do is get some of our peers and teach them some skills on how to talk to other peers and maybe an in-school program where you can go to a peer and speak about your personal problems, so you can feel more comfortable and don't have to feel like, 'Oh well, I can't say this because this person is an adult, and they might look at me like this or they might judge me like this.'"

"And the adult denial starts with not so much as ignorance, but probably a little bit of, you know, belligerence, not trying to hear the students or trying to avoid it. That's one of the main reasons that cause children to go out and do violence and do other stuff."

“Most kids don’t trust their teachers.” This is a statement from a smaller, two-hour summit convened by Congressman Rush Holt.

A recent anecdote from a colleague: After making a presentation to a New Jersey high school class, my colleague suggested that if a student has a problem, he or she should speak with their school counselor. One student responded that she had done just that and was told by the school counselor that she shouldn’t come unless it was an emergency and that that was school policy.

Recommendations: Significantly increase the number of trained counselors in our schools. The current ratio of one counselor for every 436 students is unacceptable. We also need to increase the number of trained volunteers or paid adults that work in our schools, for example, as provided by the New Jersey Child Assault Prevention Program, whom I think you’ll hear from later.

SENATOR MARTIN: Folks, I’m going to ask you to keep it down over there please. We’ve got a--

DR. GREENE: Thank you, Senator.

Establish programs to train students as nonjudgmental listeners and mentors; identify at least two adults in a school to whom students can go to and talk with about anything that may be troubling them as well as about their dreams and interests that they would like to pursue.

The second principle. Schools are communities, and the social and psychological dynamics and messages conveyed within our schools have a powerful effect on the students and adults that comprise this community whether implicitly or explicitly reinforced, in subtle or not-so-subtle forms.

Exploitative, discriminatory, and derogatory attitudes and behaviors can lead to the minor and major forms of inter- and intrapersonal violence that we all want to stop.

Related comments from our students.

“We need to be recognized, as youth, as more positive because, I mean, in the media, you see people killing each other and all the bad things, but you never see any good things coming out of our youth, and we really need that encouragement.”

“We need to have mandatory race relations courses. They need to have a specific class dealing with racism and discrimination.”

“Hold more forums like this one on race and on race relations with other teens.”

“You should also be able to have a class where you can go in and share some experiences and be taught some lessons on how to deal with everyday life.”

“Another thing that might help everyone is one or two days where the school divides into groups like they did today. You know, like just get into different groups in the school and make different topics and speak on those topics. And peer-to-peer meetings to get to know each other so there won't be, you know, people not liking other people and therefore causing violence and things of that nature.”

SENATOR MARTIN: You're not deliberately insulting my daughter, are you, with all those "you knows"? She's a senior in high school. That's exactly the way she talks.

DR. GREENE: “If they have these peer mediated classes, they might develop a type of trust with the students. Therefore, if they have a problem, they won’t run or go out into the streets and do something negative. They will have someone to always come to. They will have someone always to rely on.”

“You can also have a basically diverse group inside of one classroom and have everybody talk about different things. By talking about different things, you’ll find many things that you talk about you may have in common, which will bring you more together and not have your cliques in segregated places.”

“Instead of coming off negative, you should get to know the youth.” This was a reference to the police and security guards.

“It is only human to feel angered and rebellious when you are ridiculed or are the punch line of some childish joke. School is a place where you will especially see these issues.”

“I think the best way to prevent violence in schools is to give students a comfortable place to talk with equals about their problems and try to find a way to get around or hopefully come up with a solution and attempt to keep the things under control. I’d also like to add that teens do not schedule their problems. They should be able to talk when it is needed, not when their agenda tells them to. We don’t need these random acts of violence, and I think groups or private peer mediation can be a great solution to aid us in our fight against violence.”

“You got to get respect to give your respect.”

Recommendations: Establish student and adult forums to identify, discuss, and address the deleterious, as well as healing and supportive, interpersonal dynamics that are occurring in schools. The students and adults should meet both separately and together. Particularly in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling, *Aurelia Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, that renders schools receiving Federal aid financially liable if they are deliberately indifferent to reported cases of severe and pervasive student on student sexual harassment, we need to establish policies and procedures to address sexual harassment and other forms of harassment, including bullying. Such policies need to spell out what is and what is not acceptable behavior, including verbal behavior, by students and by school staff and promulgate procedures for responding to violations of such rules. Establish training programs for school personnel and curricular materials for students to help understand the reasons for such policies and understand the impact of harassing and bullying behavior.

New Jersey can become a leader in this endeavor, but only if we begin now and if we do it in a rigorous, thoughtful, and comprehensive manner. Establish counseling protocols for adult and student violators of the policies.

Third and last principle. Student, and not just the student council president types, need to be involved in the establishment of school policies and programs. They need to be involved in order to secure their commitment to such policies, ensure that the programs meet their needs and interests, and to give the students a real sense of belonging and ownership in the schools. It is only through opportunities to take on responsibility that young people will become responsible.

Related comments from our students.

“We decided that youth and adults need to get together and discuss why these things, family and youth violence, are happening and how they are happening and what can make them better.”

“In most of our groups, we did not agree with suspension. And if there was going to be any suspension, it should be inside the school, and it shouldn't be fun. It should be something that will turn the kid off, so he won't or she won't want to get into trouble anymore. Giving a child suspension and telling them to take three or four days off school is just giving them a free way to do what they are going to do.”

“Youth feel like they have no voice when they call DYFS. Because of the seriousness of the problem, they feel that they should have a voice. Like okay, where I want to go, or maybe if I do want to stay with my parents, but I just want them to calm down the beatings. I just want them to talk about it.”

“There are enough rules, but they are not being enforced.”

Recommendations. Students should be given the time and space and corresponding training to discuss among themselves the kind of policies and programs that they would like to see adopted in their schools as well as in the community. The students also need to be given the opportunity to serve alongside adults on committees and task forces. And I am pleased that Buster Soaries reenforced this, and we're going to be working with them to see that this really happens.

The students should not be token representatives with no voting power, but should be given enough power and influence to have an impact on what policies and programs are adopted. Students should be encouraged to

contribute to the development of policies and programs through multiple avenues including student newspapers, poetry clubs, debate clubs, theater, and so on. Consider the possibility of high school students serving on boards of education.

Thank you. I will be glad to respond to any comments or questions.

SENATOR MARTIN: This is interesting stuff.

Unfortunately, we're not going to be able to take the other witnesses. I know that's a disservice and a misrepresentation, but this room is being coerced from us at 11:30 a.m.

We do have a couple of minutes if anyone has a question for Dr. Greene.

Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Just a quick one.

I was reading and listening to the student comments, and I observed the recommendations from both sides of the statement. One of the things that I've always found of interest and I think is very important -- that we, in government and in the courts-- (remainder of comment indiscernible) And that's to let a student know that in their own way, they're appreciated and loved for the good work that they do. And that was kind of brought out in one of those comments, but the recommendations on either side didn't address that as a recommendation -- how to get that done without everybody being sued. The students need reenforcement.

DR. GREENE: I think that there were a couple of recommendations that I think did address it. One is to have adults available

to talk to kids about their dreams, interests, their aspirations, their ideas. And this way, by talking freely with the adults in the schools, I think they'll get rewarded and reenforced by pursuing their dreams and interests. We tend to focus, and I think it's implied in your comment-- We tend to focus on the negative and don't appreciate the positive that the students bring to the table.

SENATOR RICE: But I'll leave it at that. I don't think that addresses that. I think, from what I was reading-- I didn't write that statement. It was clear to me that some students were saying, "Ron, you did a great job." I think that's what the implication was. Some students are offended by the fact that they can't get close to people in that type of manner in school because of what we have done.

I just wanted to, at least, have you take another look at that.

DR. GREENE: Okay. I appreciate that.

SENATOR MARTIN: Senator Robertson.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: Just out of curiosity, in the last section you talked about -- you had children saying that suspensions shouldn't be easy, other children saying that there are enough rules, but they're not being enforced, and yet none of the recommendations that you made, pursuant to that section, addresses itself to the enforcement of existing rules. It talks about ways in which we can empower students, but again what do we say to those students who may be the victims of violence about the degree to which we're going to commit ourselves to creating a safer place for them in an immediate fashion?

DR. GREENE: I didn't include that directly in my recommendations. I think you increase the likelihood of enforcing the rules

and students complying with them to the degree that they're involved in the development of those rules and those policies. And they can be very helpful, I think, to all of us in terms of what will work in terms of the rules and what can be enforced.

Several of the students made a recommendation that there ought to be, for the most part, in-school suspensions rather than out-of-school suspensions. I think that's something that we ought to pay attention to. We, too quickly, at oftentimes minor instances, throw the kids out of the school, ask them to get a note from a shrink, and say that they're okay. This is good business for the shrinks, but it doesn't help the student at all, and it conveys a message that's not very helpful to them.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: And shouldn't we be recommending a review of enforcement regiments?

DR. GREENE: I think we should, yes.

SENATOR ROBERTSON: I was going to say perhaps we should include that in a recommendation.

DR. GREENE: Yes, I agree. I tried to be as-- Within a 10-minute span, I couldn't include all the recommendations I might feel ought to be included. And I think that ought to be in there. Yes, I agree.

SENATOR MARTIN: Thank you, Senator Robertson.

We will have to suspend our Joint Committee on the Public Schools Meeting on dealing with violence in the schools. It may be slightly apropos to the Judiciary meeting which is to follow.

I truly apologize. People were here--

As I indicated before, we had-- There were no other meetings supposed to be this morning anywhere and including this room, but certain events have happened which have made that impossible. We will have an additional or a continuation of this meeting at some time, and we will try as best we can to make sure there's no interference. We will concentrate especially on those who are out in the field.

We will lead off, if they're still willing to come, with the three witnesses who were not able to speak this morning.

Again I apologize to them. This is Trenton.

Thank you.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)