



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

NEWS RELEASE

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WILLIAM BRATTON ADDRESSES 300 SCHOOL AND POLICE OFFICIALS AT KICKOFF OF ASTORINO’S “SAFER COMMUNITIES” INITIATIVE Former NYC Police Commissioner urges improved collaboration following Newtown tragedy

Educators and police from throughout Westchester County were urged Wednesday by former New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton to make collaboration an integral piece of their efforts to keep schools and communities safe from violence.

The event was part of the Safer Communities initiative launched by County Executive Robert P. Astorino in the aftermath of the Newton, Conn. tragedy. Astorino invited police and school officials from every jurisdiction in Westchester, including public, private and parochial schools.

About 300 people attended the School Safety Symposium, held at Purchase College.

“The stark reality is that senseless acts of violence can never be completely eliminated,” Astorino said. “But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try. It’s a complicated issue – we all know that. There are public safety concerns, mental health issues and all sorts of societal influences at work.”

Bratton, the keynote speaker, said three elements were critical to making schools safer:

- Partnership – Parents, teachers, police, fire and other first responders need to work together.
- Problem-solving – This starts with understanding the problem and working to fix it.
- Prevention – With most problems there are warning signals. Communities need to be on the lookout for them and then address them.

He emphasized collaboration, saying, “There needs to be a seamless organization. We can’t continue to operate in silos. There’s too much at stake.”

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The Safer Communities initiative brings together resources inside and outside county government to protect schools and communities from acts of senseless violence. It is a combination of practical, ready-to-go programs that combat violence by drawing on the expertise of the county departments of Public Safety, Health and Community Mental Health in collaboration with local police chiefs, educators, clergy, civic leaders and elected officials. The goals are to *educate* the public about available services and programs, *enhance* those capabilities and *evaluate* progress on an ongoing and long-term basis.

On April 9, the second part of the initiative will take place, when the departments of Health and Community Mental Health hold a “Community Violence Prevention Forum” at the County Center. The county is working with the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the program, whose emphasis will be to address violence as a public health issue that affects all of our communities.

Wednesday’s session was organized by George N. Longworth, the commissioner of the county’s Department of Public Safety, and the Westchester County Chiefs of Police Association. It was designed to provide educators with practical guidance on how to make schools safer and enhance coordination between law enforcement and school districts.

In addition to Bratton, the former chief of police in Los Angeles, there were presentations by a variety of school security experts as well as a panel discussion. These included the following:

- An Overview of School-based Violence in America – Charles H. Boklan, U.S. Secret Service (Retired)
- Practical Emergency Preparedness for Schools – Matthew A. Miraglia, a noted school security expert
- Police Response to Dynamic Incidents in Schools – Chief Inspector John Hodges, Westchester County Department of Public Safety.

The panel discussion focused on the dynamics among law enforcement, school officials and parents during a crisis and bridging gaps between strategies that look good on paper and real-time decision making in actual situations. The panelists were: Astorino; Louis Wool, Superintendent of Schools, Harrison Central School District, and president of the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents; Kelly Chiarella, region director, Westchester-East Putnam PTA; Isabel Burk, coordinator of school safety, Southern Westchester BOCES; Special Agent Maryann Goldman, FBI; and Detective Martin Greenberg, Mount Pleasant Police Department.

School officials interested in having similar sessions conducted in their districts should contact their local police department or the Department of Public Safety at 864-7858.