



NEWS RELEASE

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PASSAIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE BIAS CRIMES TEAM PRESENTS AT HAWTHORNE SCHOOL IN HAWTHORNE

PATERSON, NEW JERSEY:

November 24, 2023

Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia M. Valdes announces that the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office (PCPO) Bias Crime Legal and Investigative Team is continuing its community outreach and conducted an educational presentation on November 22, 2023, at Hawthorne High School in Hawthorne on the topics of Bias and Bullying. The goal of the presentations were to educate students about Bias by providing real-life practical examples to empower students to make better decisions.

The presentations, led by Senior Assistant Prosecutor Billy Can, Assistant Prosecutor Haley Leibowitz and Assistant Prosecutor Robert J. Serrano, were geared toward ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students. During the presentation, students were taught the difference between a Bias Incident and a Bias Crime with an interactive discussion about the ramifications of targeting a person of a protected class, based in part, upon their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and/or disability. Also, part of the presentations were Passaic County Prosecutor's Office Detective Lieutenant Maria Tejada and Detective John Saleh.

The Bias Legal Team explained that actions by a student directed at a classmate from a protected class would not only be investigated by the school but would also be reported to the PCPO Bias Unit and could subject a student to criminal consequences. The Bias Legal Team focused on the impact of social media on students, explaining that even though certain questionable statements/comments are conveyed on a virtual platform and heard by a large audience does not preclude them from being considered Bias, nor should a student believe that repeating those words or actions would insulate them from possible repercussions. In addition, the students were taught the social ramifications of promulgating bias in their community.

Students were encouraged to report any incidents of suspected Bias to a school official or another trusted adult and, most significantly, reminded that negative actions taken today against another could have lasting effects that may impact college plans and beyond. Students were further advised

that reports of suspected Bias or Bullying could also be reported anonymously to a teacher and then reviewed, with possible involvement of the PCPO. It is the hope of the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office to stop the spread of hate among the youths of Passaic County.

For more information about having PCPO conduct a Bias Presentation at your school, please email Executive First Assistant James P. Berado at jberado@passaiccountynj.org



Pictured, left to right: Assistant Principal Cheryl Pasquale, Principal Kevin Pfister, Detective John Saleh, Detective Lieutenant Maria Tejada, Assistant Prosecutor Haley Leibowitz, Assistant Prosecutor Robert Serrano, and Senior Assistant Prosecutor Billy Can.