

I want to thank Chairwoman McCarthy, Ranking Member Platts and members of the Sub-committee on Healthy Families and Communities for holding this hearing to explore the gang prevention activities on Long Island to learn what might be replicated across the country. The reduction of gang recruitment efforts along with prevention of gang related crime is essential to the safety of all residents of our country. The FBI Long Island Office reports that the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, gang has been deemed to be a "High Threat" to the northeast section of our country due to its involvement in murder, assaults with weapons, firearms possession, drug distribution, extortion from businesses, prostitution and robbery.

The immediate focus of the Freeport Police Departments efforts to mitigate gang recruitment was a Gang Awareness Suppression and Prevention Program (GASPP). The demographics of the street gang population encompass a broad spectrum of race, ethnicity, gender and age and the program provides gang related information to parents, community members, school staffs, and the work force in an effort to reduce gang recruitment

The awareness component of GASPP provides a description of various behaviors, and physical observations, which together or in some cases independently, are indicative of gang involvement. While the information provided in the GASPP brochure (attachment # 1) is representative of gang indicators, it is not all-inclusive. Symbols, colors, hand signs, clothing and gang codes consistently change due to Police awareness and fashion trends. The changes in team logos and colors of professional sports organizations are frequently the impetus for such changes.

The prevention element of GASPP encompasses many youth-oriented activities. These include mentoring programs for elementary school students, along with a guide for parents that advises them of the many programs available to their child as an alternative to gangs. Community members and businesses are requested to engage in positive interaction with adolescents to encourage appropriate social interaction. Business owners, residents, and team coaches, are all requested to actively communicate with students who are engaging in inappropriate behavior. This is done in a manner that is courteous and provides positive instruction as a means of conveying the necessity of civil behavior and to further individual achievement. The School District Superintendent, together with high and middle school administrators, meet monthly with a Freeport Police Department command staff member to develop strategy to prevent gang activity in the schools and community based upon recent gang incidents. Informal sharing occurs between the school staff and police in close time proximity to any gang involved offense when students are participants. (Please see attachment #1 for detailed explanation of the GASPP program.)

The suppression element of GASPP involves various law enforcement programs that are performed independently or in conjunction with community resources to discourage gang-related activity. Suppression efforts include partnerships with federal and state prosecutors, along with a task force made up of federal, state and local law enforcement

members. Participation in the FBI Gang Task Force has provided additional law enforcement resources for conducting criminal investigations of gangs with a focus on their leadership. These investigations have resulted in the arrest and successful prosecution of sixty-five members of Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13. Other gangs that are prevalent throughout Long Island such as the Latin King, Bloods, and Crips are being investigated for crimes similar to the type committed by MS-13, by both the FBI Gang Task Force and local law enforcement. The Federal Court, without a prior conviction of a predicate felony, may not prosecute individual gang members, who are seventeen years of age or less. Therefore gang members who have a defense based on their age are prosecuted locally. The MS 13 members who were arrested were involved in the commission of various violent crimes that include dealing drugs, possession of firearms, rape, robbery and murder.

Another cooperative gang suppression effort is a partnership with the Nassau County Probation Department that teams Police Officers with Probation Officers. The Probation Department Officers lead the teams that visit the residences of probationers who are gang members. These visits serve to ensure that the probationers are not in violation of any terms of their probation. This compliance program also verifies that gang members are not associating with other gang members or in possession of any firearms or drugs. It also provides a means to establish that they are abiding by curfew restrictions, thereby discouraging their participation in crime.

Supplementing traditional gang prevention techniques, the Freeport Police Department has developed and implemented a Home Visit Program (HVP). The HVP has been designed to assist the parents of gang members by helping them recognize their child's association with a gang. This usually takes place prior to an arrest of their son or daughter. After a Police Officer has confirmed that an individual is involved with a gang and the information is passed on to the Commanding Officer of the Freeport Police Department's Community Response Unit (CRU). Two Detectives are assigned to conduct a home visit of the gang member's family to discuss their child's participation in the gang and advise them of the resources available to the family to help them discourage their child's further participation in the gang. The initial reaction to the police visit is denial of their child's involvement. Only after the detectives present the parents with evidence that includes gang indicators such as tattoos, limited clothing attire restricted by color, letters or product initials, observation of hand signing, and their child or friends, are not hearing challenged, along with drawings, and gang paraphernalia in their school bags or books do, the parents realize that their child is involved with gangs. In some instances, parents have relocated their son or daughter with relatives in other states or even other countries. Other parents have expressed frustration and a lack of hope with regard to their child's future. A small percentage are currently gang members themselves or don't see a problem with their child's involved gang membership. During testimony to the Nassau County Legislation Public Safety Committee, a Roosevelt, N.Y. Community Activist testified that the gang members in her neighborhood helped her grow up and she saw no problem with them hanging out with her children. She further stated that the only gang she was afraid of was the gang dressed in blue that drive white cars with blue and orange stripes. This was a reference to the Nassau County Police

Department. To make the HVP more effective, a partnership has been established with the Freeport Pride Youth Outreach organization, that has resulted in providing the parents with follow up referral services and involvement by their social workers.

School Based Programs

The Freeport Police Department Adopt-A-Cop Program is another activity that was developed to discourage youth from entering a gang. The Adopt A Cop Program was formulated to provide a positive informal interaction between students and police officers. The program requires the "adoption" of one police officer by each 4th grade class who will meet with their "adopted" Officer at the onset of the program and monthly thereafter throughout the school year. The officers who are involved in the Adopt A Cop program are volunteers. Of the ninety-two Freeport police officers, twenty-eight volunteer as Adopt A Cops.

During the monthly meeting, officers conduct an open exchange of ideas and discussions with their students that centers around the fore mentioned goals and objectives. The officers also schedule tours of Police Headquarters and attend the school trips by their respective classes. At the completion of each meeting, each student composes a letter to their police officer including any comments or questions which pertains to the prior meeting, or other police related concerns. The officer responds with a general letter to the entire class, which is read to them by their teacher in between meetings.

At the end of the school year, all of the fourth grade students, their adopted Police Officers and additional Police resources, celebrate the end of their school year together with Adopt A Cop Day. The day is filled with interactive presentations that include tours of a Police helicopter, Horse Mounted Officer, SCUBA and K-9 demonstrations. Pizza, hot dogs, soda and ice cream are enjoyed by all of the day's participants. In addition each child is also given an Adopt a Cop tee shirt.

Goals and Objectives:

-

-

The goals and objectives of the Adopt A Cop program are to:

- A) Encourage the mutually beneficial exchange of information and concerns between the Adopted Cop and his/her class.
- B) Provide a positive police officer role model, thereby dispelling negative police stereotypes.
- C) Educate children about their safety, and discuss methods which the children may use to avoid potential hazardous situations, including gang recruitment efforts.

- D) Discuss projects and non-violent forms of entertainment as a positive alternative to questionable media entertainment.
- E) Provide an avenue for children to discuss positive alternate means to resolve conflict, or express anger or frustration as an alternative to violence or alcohol/drug use.
- F) Provide insight into the function of police officers, and encourage students to consider law enforcement as a possible career.
- G) Contribute to the development of the children who participate in the Adopt A Cop program.

Each of the officers who participate as Adopt-A-Cop Program volunteers receive the Freeport Police Department Community Service Award at the bi-annual award dinner.

This program is currently in its eleventh year of operation.

The Safe Schools Healthy Students grant had funded a similar but much smaller police mentoring program that was designed for middle school students, who were recognized to be considered "at risk" of gang involvement. This program had been proposed by the Freeport Police Department to the Safe Schools Healthy Students Program Committee Members. The committee included the Freeport School District, Nassau County BOCES, Operation Pride, Freeport Youth Outreach, and the South Shore Child Guidance Center. Middle school students were selected as the program participants due to a conscious belief by the program membership that this mentoring program would complement the Adopt-A-Cop program. Due to grant funding limitations, the program was limited with regard to the number of participants to achieve the greatest impact with limited resources. It was decided that middle school administrators and teachers would select those students they believed to be "at risk" of gang involvement for this program.

Ultimately the program would include this group of middle school students who the committee members believed would benefit the most from interaction with police officers. The programs six police officers would interact weekly during a shared school based lunch meeting. On weekends, students and police officers would jointly participate in sports, trips, and movie outings. The officers received an hourly rate, which was substantially less than their police officer salaries as per diem school district employees. Unfortunately, in spite of its success, when the grant funding expired, the school district was unable to continue the program.

Gang prevention efforts must also include educational programs that assist adolescents in achieving important developmental skills. In 2004, the Freeport Police Department introduced an employment skills workshop designed to facilitate employment opportunities for middle school students. The workshop provides these students with insight into the job application process, interview, preparation and employment expectations. The information provided affords students the opportunity to be readily prepared to seek employment opportunities, thereby offering a counter balance to the limitations imposed by gang membership. Gangs grant status to members who are violent, possess an active and lengthy criminal record and embrace a disregard of societies value on life, individual responsibility and achievement. These traits are counterproductive to being successful in seeking employment. The aforementioned gang tenets preclude a chance for a successful job interview in contrast to the Employment Skills Workshop. (Please see attachment #2, Employment Skills Workshop).

Community Partnership

The aforementioned police initiatives were presented as initial efforts to address the proliferation of gangs and related crime issues. Continuing in this vein in 2002, Mayor Glacken and the Board of Trustees with the Freeport Police Department, in conjunction with the Freeport school district, formed a consortium of various organizations and institutions that are associated with the Freeport community. The organization was formed and named the Officials Working Group (OWG) for the purpose of preventing gang related crime through the concerted utilization of new and existing resources. The main committee meets monthly, while the sub-committees meet during the month and report on their progress at the main monthly meeting.

Representation on the committee rapidly expanded to include the Nassau County District Attorney's Office, Nassau County Youth Board, Freeport Parent Teachers Association (PTA), Hofstra University Liberty Partnership, Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Junior Achievement, Nassau County Equal Opportunity Commission, Freeport Recreation Department, Freeport Pride, Education Tutorial Services, Struggling To Reunite Our New Generation (STRONG), along with representatives of various religious clergy and community advocates. The School Superintendent chairs the committee.

In the beginning, the committee decided to focus on reducing crime by addressing street gang violence and related anti-social behavior in the schools and community. Committee members determined that the first objective would be to discourage gang recruitment efforts through community and parental awareness presentations. A revised gang awareness program was developed from the pre-existing Freeport Police Department Gang Awareness, Suppression & Prevention (GASP) program. The expanded Gang Awareness Program (GAP) is designed to inform community members, with an emphasis

on parents of students, about how to determine if a person is involved in a gang through the identification of specific characteristics unique to street gang members. In addition, the presentation list the reasons people join gangs, along with a description of their rites of initiation and explanation of the types of crimes they are associated with.

The most powerful allure of a gang is the sense of power and respect that is perceived to come with membership; the power of numbers, control of a neighborhood, and fear of their potential for committing random acts of violence, that is mistaken for respect. These misplaced beliefs, in conjunction with a sense of being family or brothers or sisters against other gangs and those who they perceive as being different, creates a sense of unity. In reality, the love, power, respect, and unity of gang membership is a path to arrest, imprisonment, injury, hospitalization, and death. A community involvement component of GAP lists the various resources available to discourage gang recruitment efforts. This includes involvement in alternative structural school activities, increased parental involvement in the education process, and access to professional counseling in schools via accredited private social outreach services. These prevention efforts, to be effective, must be in place to assist students as early as third grade.

One OWG sub-committee has developed a bilingual "Guide to School and Community Activities for School Age Children." The guide provides parents with a broad variety of supervised and structured activities as an alternate to idle time. The activities are listed according to a child's age and grade. (Please see attachment #3 for the current guide).

A member of the OWG who was partnered with an officer from the Freeport Police Department Community Response Unit (CRU) gave each GAP presentation, and by February 2004, every school PTA in the Freeport School District had a GAP presentation.. Additional presentations are currently offered to any religious congregation or civic association willing to host the program. Unfortunately, most of the presentations that have taken place were poorly attended.

The expansion of Police Department school-based mentoring programs, interagency collaboration and interactive resident/police communications respective to street crime or related activity, supplement the many initiatives described above. In conjunction with these efforts, the Police Department provides an assessment of the gang issues facing village residents along with insight into existing police-sponsored programs and enforcement operations. Group dynamics of the OWG participants have afforded the members an opportunity to enhance existing programs. As discussed prior, the Freeport Police Department "Home Visit Program" (HVP) has been changed to provide an additional resource. Now when CRU officers visit the homes of known gang members to offer assistance to the gang member's parent(s), an additional service is provided. Freeport Pride, a private youth outreach program, is working with CRU officers to include their social workers in the HVP to offer their assistance and alternate program awareness to the gang members family.

Another sub-committee is tasked with researching new programs for students as a deterrent to gang recruitment. The committee members also arrange for former gang members or other motivational speakers to address student groups. One sub-committee has the responsibility for researching new law proposals that are designed to deter gang related crime. Other members are assigned to pursue the development of new initiatives and partnerships with like organizations outside Freeport. These include the; Hispanic Counseling Center, Family and Children Associations, Nassau County Youth Board, Nassau County Department of Social Services, and the Salvation Army.

One of the new initiatives that have been implemented is a student survey. The survey was conducted in anticipation that the results would assist the committee with identifying areas of need that the committee would focus on to better assist students with meeting today's challenges. The framework of the Search Institute survey evaluates a student's sense of possessing skills or "Developmental Assets" in the following five categories.

- 1) On going relationships with caring adults.
- 2) Safe places and structured activities during non-school hours.
- 3) A healthy start for a healthy future.
- 4) Marketable skills through effective education.
- 5) Opportunities to serve.

Currently the OWG is evaluating the results of a Developmental Asset Survey that was given to even grade students from 4th to 12th grades. The Search Institute vision is to "Have a world where all young people are valued and thrive". (Please see attachment #4 for a descriptive booklet on the survey)

While Freeport School students offered responses that are comparable to national average results, the specific asset deficiencies were disheartening. This is especially true with regard to the following;

- 1) Positive family communications-only 16% locally and 28% nationally have this asset
- 2) Have high expectations for themselves-56% locally and 48% nationally have this asset
- 3) A sense of bonding to the school-38% locally and 52% nationally have this asset
- 4) The ability to initiate peaceful conflict resolution-21% locally and 40% nationally
- 5) A sense of feeling safe-42% locally and 51% nationally
- 6) Have and understand family boundaries-36% locally and 46% nationally
- 7) Experience positive peer influence-54% locally and 63% nationally
- 8) Use time at home constructively-43% locally and 51% nationally
- 9) Feel capable of exercising restraint-30% locally and 45% nationally

The above survey results, while not specific enticements to gang involvement, help explain the allure of a gang as a surrogate family. The unity, love and respect that is

perceived to be, or is missing in the family, creates a void that gang membership purports to fill.

Family values once taken for granted as the foundation for child development have been seriously eroded. Inappropriate societal influences including entertainment media, video games, and magazines, such as "Don Diva", glorify violence and misogynistic views. These sources, combined with a news media, that sensationalizes horrific acts of violence, become difficult influences for parents and schools to overcome. In addition, a confused sense as to what constitutes traditional cultural values contributes to minimizing the reservations a person may have with regard to joining a gang.

Multi-culturalism without support for the established cultural values & beliefs contributes to national confusion on how to address many of the problems facing society. A "melting pot" without a common language will become a "Tower of Babel". The ability to engage in effective communication is an essential element of any successful gang eradication effort. Confused or misunderstood communications frequently result in unattended and sometimes deadly consequences. I have witnessed native-born gang members openly discuss their distrust of non-English speaking members of opposing gangs during school gang prevention workshops.

The allure of gang membership in some cases originates from a family member. In many cases either the father or sibling is the pathway to gang membership. The family legacy road to gang membership is more common within Hispanic gangs, where two or more generations who belong to the same gang may live together. Even families without a gang member within it are experiencing difficulty with raising their children due to the outside influences.

In a recent disturbing trend, the Freeport Police Department has experienced an increase in domestic incident calls that involve parents who state that they are overwhelmed and feels incapable of dealing with the behavioral issues of their child. Most of these parents are looking for help and guidance. Others have stated that they don't care about their child and want the Police to take them and place them in jail or any place, just away from them. These children have been abandoned in place and will be at risk absent meaningful intervention by reinvigorated and accomplished government services.

The effectiveness of the programs described herein is difficult to weigh. In spite of the efforts expended, gangs proliferate in surrounding communities, while their membership numbers remain relatively constant within Freeport. The gang recruiting that has been thwarted is due to the collective labors of the Freeport Police Department and its many partners. The total magnitude of the gang activity that has been prevented is an intangible. The obvious and consensus view is that more needs to be done on the federal, state and local levels.

The most important next step is changing the culture to restore values that incorporate and encourage a sense of unity, respect, and devotion to guarantee the rights of others to be free from threats, intimidation or harm. Free speech issues must be weighed in the

context of offense it was intended to cause. Restrictions on profanity do not restrict a person's ability to communicate. Conversely, our ability to communicate would be enhanced by the expansion of vocabulary for the purpose of engaging in persuasive communication without vulgarity.

The family must plant courtesy and the skills of positive social interaction during infancy. Overwhelmingly, television has become the primary babysitter of youth. The social skills developed through this medium bear little resemblance to "Sesame Street" and are more representative of the "Jerry Springer Show." Parenting skill programs and related educational programs must find a way into our early child development efforts. The subsequent benefit to focusing on early development skills and communication programs will achieve benefits in reducing domestic violence, providing academic, and skills learning, all of which are measurable outcomes. They also support a cohesive family unit as the primary deterrent to gang involvement. Furthermore we must work to ensure that all people are embraced and afforded opportunity as true equals. This is a daunting task that must be implemented as soon as possible. Anything less than the timely implementation of these principles will guarantee that our gang prevention efforts will be as successful as the current "war on drugs".