

***Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office***

***Acting Prosecutor Lori Linskey***

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**MCPO LAUNCHES LGBTQ+ LAW ENFORCEMENT LIAISON and SAFE PLACE programs**

FREEHOLD **–** It’s a simple notion that speaks directly to the twin tenets of equality and justice that no one, anywhere, should ever have to fear being exactly who they are.

It’s also the driving force behind Acting Monmouth County Prosecutor Lori Linskey yesterday announcing the launch of the MCPO LGBTQ+ Law Enforcement Liaison Program and the SAFE PLACE Program, two new initiatives intended to foster improved relations between the LGBTQ+ community and law enforcement in Monmouth County, as well as provide individuals belonging to federally protected classes safe places from which to report bias incidents and/or hate crimes.

“Like New Jersey at large, Monmouth County is a vibrant, diverse place where individuals hailing from countless different backgrounds come to live, work, and visit,” Acting Prosecutor Linskey said. “Every single one of them deserves to feel safe and welcomed here, and we plan to do everything in our power to ensure that they always do.”

Gathering for yesterday’s announcement were local elected officials and police chiefs, numerous LGBTQ+ Law Enforcement Liaisons from across the state, as well as members of MCPO executive leadership and Acting New Jersey Attorney General Andrew Bruck – the first member of the LGBTQ+ community to serve as the Garden State’s chief law enforcement officer.

“Initiatives like these empower members of the LGBTQ+ community by letting them know they have allies everywhere,” Bruck said. “I applaud Acting Prosecutor Linskey for her leadership in bringing these meaningful programs to Monmouth County.”

Through the MCPO LGBTQ+ Law Enforcement Liaison Program, the Prosecutor’s Office is hopeful that many of the more than 50 law-enforcement agencies across the county will designate a department Liaison; the designee may be any sworn or civilian employee who identifies as LGBTQ+ (or as an ally) and wishes to serve as a connection point between law enforcement and the local LGBTQ+ community. The Liaisons will then collaborate with those communities to address issues of concern, and to support MCPO’s service to the public.

A Liaison’s responsibilities will also include, among other things:

* With supervisory approval, attend events in the LGBTQ+ community as a representative of the MCPO;
* Meet with and provide a forum for business owners, community groups, schools, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, and present information on relevant law enforcement/community issues;
* Become fully familiar with the Attorney General’s Bias Incident Investigation Standards and the definitions of bias incidents and related criminal violations pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 2C:16-1(a)(1) or (2);
* Assist, advise, and consult with MCPO Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives on cases involving the LGBTQ+ community or LGBTQ+ issues;
* Provide support, upon request, to LGBTQ+ staff members;
* Provide diversity trainings, with supervisory approval, at the Monmouth County Police Academy or in other forums, upon request; and
* Provide an annual report to the Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office on activities of the Liaison position and public safety trends related to the LGBTQ+ community.

The Liaisons will also participate in the local implementation of MCPO SAFE PLACE, a public-private partnership centered on the reporting of bias incidents and hate crimes targeting any protected class of individuals – whether motivated by race, color, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or ethnicity.Through the Program, local participating businesses, social organizations, and schools will be given brightly colored decals for posting prominently in an entrance area, allowing anyone who spots them to know that the location will provide a safe environment for someone to call 911 for assistance if they believe they have been the target of a bias incident or hate crime.

New Jersey’s Bias Intimidation statute is applied whenever an underlying crime is determined to have been committed with a “purpose to intimidate an individual or group of individuals” because one or more of them are members of any of the aforementioned protected classes. The degree of the Bias Intimidation charge is one degree higher than the degree of the most serious underlying charge.

Every local business, social organization, or school in Monmouth County is eligible to participate in the Program free of charge. The only requirement is twofold: if a victim of any crime (especially a hate crime) enters the premises, call 911 immediately; and allow the victim to remain on the premises until police arrive.

The SAFE PLACE program was first introduced by the Seattle Police Department in 2015, with more than 7,000 locations across the city participating by 2019. Today they sanction police departments nationwide in replicating the program in their jurisdictions; MCPO is the 293rd such agency in the U.S., Canada, or Europe to launch its own version.

“Too often, initiatives of this nature involve a wealth of talk and a dearth of action – that’s why we’re so enthusiastic about the fact that this announcement was just the first step toward something much bigger,” Acting Prosecutor Linskey said. “Through these two programs, members of our Office and local police departments will be reaching out and making connections in their local communities. They’ll be listening to their constituents, having meaningful conversations, and effecting actual positive change. Making things like this possible is precisely why I took this job.”

The SAFE PLACE program will be piloted with the cooperation of the municipal leadership and police departments of Asbury Park, Long Branch, and Red Bank, yet participation ultimately will be open to all locations countywide.

Most of the Prosecutor’s Office eight inaugural volunteer Law Enforcement Liaisons – a group that includes investigators and assistant prosecutors alike – attended Wednesday’s event, which included the raising of a Pride flag at the Office’s main entrance. It will remain in place through Monday, October 11 – National Coming Out Day 2021.

If your business, social organization, or school is interested in participating in MCPO SAFE PLACE, contact the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office at SafePlace@mcponj.org or your local police department.