



## **ATLANTIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE INITIATES INNOVATIVE NEW VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION PROGRAM**

The Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office is announcing that applications are being accepted for Alternative Prosecution for Positive Outcomes ("APPO"), an innovative new program that aims to interrupt the cycle of violence by giving certain eligible offenders the chance at downgrades or diversion by agreeing to a course of trauma-informed therapeutic treatment.

While progress has been made, Atlantic County continues to experience more than its share of violence and gun crime, particularly among young people. Atlantic County regularly ranks in the top ten of all counties across the State of New Jersey in the category of homicides. Many factors contribute, but research has shown that poor decision-making and impulse control by immature individuals leads to the most violent offenses. With that in mind, ACPO is looking to find and address those individuals and their needs before tragic results occur.

APPO is designed to embrace the Atlantic County community at large as a trusted alternative to prosecution by meaningfully engaging with local residents and community leaders, adapting the program to respond to unique needs as they arise. Created and managed in collaboration with a nationally recognized non-profit organization, Wellbeing & Equity Innovations ("WEI"), the Program institutes an evidence-driven, trauma-responsive approach to the interruption of violent behavior, particularly among younger adults, whose behavior tends to escalate from lesser criminal offenses to more violent ones.

The program provides individuals with the tools to handle stressful situations and thrive using programmatic and other community-based supports. Those tools include healthy coping strategies, emotional regulation and flexible thinking to navigate life, which, according to WEI helps people "recognize their dignity, potential and hope, empowering them to thrive." In addition to the individualized programs, by working closely with long-standing community-based organizations, law enforcement, and residents of the Atlantic County, APPO provides a path toward healing and growth, and away from crime.

"ACPO has made strides in addressing crime when motivated by substance abuse and mental illness," said **William E. Reynolds, Atlantic County Prosecutor**. "But so many crimes are

caused by poor decision-making and an inability for young people to see and appreciate the consequences of their actions. This violence escalates and results in tragedy. By working with WEI and community stakeholders to interrupt this cycle, we are taking a comprehensive approach to the problem can make our county safer.”

Not all defendants and offenses are eligible. The program allows for defendants who meet the criteria to engage in a course of trauma-based therapy administered by WEI in exchange for a reduced sentencing outcome, which may include probation, or, in some cases, dismissal.

The process will require the participant(s) and their defense counsel to complete an application and sign an enrollment release waiver, which is then submitted to our office for further review. The application, along with additional information on the program, may be found on our website: <https://www.acpo.org/documents>. The completed applications should be emailed to [appo@acpo.org](mailto:appo@acpo.org).