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U.S. ATTORNEY HOSTS TOWN HALL ON YOUTH, VIOLENCE, AND LIFE CHOICES

PHILADELPHIA - United States Attorney Zane David Memeger and Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey joined 32 student participants from the U.S. Attorney's Voices of Youth Anti-Violence Initiative for a film screening and panel discussion at the National Constitution Center today. The event was moderated by NBC10's Vai Sikahema.

Voices of Youth is an eight week, curriculum-based program. In its inaugural run, the program focused on students in Northwest Philadelphia due to the high incidence of violent crime and murder in that area of the city. Students from four Northwest Philadelphia High Schools were chosen to participate. They worked with Philadelphia's Village of Arts and Humanities and Well Productions. Each group produced a video, with the help of instructors, that relayed the students' thoughts and visions with regard to the impact of violence on their lives and/or the consequences of making good life choices. The videos debuted last night before hundreds of community members gathered at Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church.

Voices of Youth has been a major outreach initiative for the U.S. Attorney's Office this year and is the first to focus specifically on students and their views of violence. The videos produced from this project convey a message about the impact that violence has had on the students' lives and their community as well as about the importance of making good life choices.

"This program has been our most creative, to date," said Memeger, "and is the first to focus resources and efforts on children in our district for the purpose of positively impacting their lives. You may not be aware that it is generally the state, not the federal government, which prosecutes juveniles. Thus, by the time we at the federal level have our first interaction with a violent offender, it is usually after he or she has been through the state juvenile and adult criminal justice systems, at least once. In my many years as a prosecutor, it has not escaped my attention that positive intervention could have broken the cycle of a life of crime and saved some of the defendants we deal with from lengthy prison terms. With programs such as 'Voices of Youth', we are hoping to break the cycle so that the victimization of our community through crime can be significantly reduced."

Following the screening of the videos, U.S. Attorney Memeger, Police Commissioner Ramsey and Deputy District Attorney George Mosey joined the students in a frank and open

discussion with audience members about the impact of violence and ways to stem the tide of violence in the city of Philadelphia.

The U.S. Attorney's Office worked closely with the Northwest Community Coalition for Youth, the Philadelphia Center for Arts & Technology, principals at the participating schools: Hope Charter High School, Imhotep Charter High School, New Media Charter High School, and Martin Luther King High School.

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