

Westchester County, New York

The State of the County

Westchester
gov.com

Andrew J. Spano
Westchester County Executive
April 26, 2006

**STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
TO THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY**

APRIL 26, 2006

GOOD EVENING. CHAIRMAN RYAN, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF LEGISLATORS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY DiFIORE, ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE NICOLAI, COUNTY CLERK IDONI, ELECTED OFFICIALS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, MY WIFE BRENDA, AND THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE WATCHING THIS AT HOME.

WHEN I CAME INTO OFFICE 9 YEARS AGO, THERE WERE THINGS WE HAD TO FIX.

WHEN I BEGAN MY SECOND TERM, THERE WERE THINGS WE HAD TO COMPLETE.

AND NOW, AS I BEGIN MY THIRD TERM, THERE ARE THINGS WE HAVE TO BUILD UPON AS WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE. WHAT KIND OF COUNTY DO WE WANT WESTCHESTER TO BE — FOR OUR CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILDREN?

WORKING WITH YOUR BOARD, WE HAVE MADE WESTCHESTER SAFER, STRONGER, AND HEALTHIER. WE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE STATE TO EASE THE MEDICAID BURDEN ON COUNTY TAXPAYERS. WE HAVE MET THE CHALLENGE TO HELP THE MEDICAL CENTER SURVIVE. WE CONTINUE TO PROTECT CHILDREN AGAINST PREDATORS AND ASSIST SENIORS THROUGH THE MAZE OF MEDICARE. WE HAVE MAINTAINED OUR FOCUS ON EMERGENCY SERVICES AND HAVE TRAINED AND EQUIPPED THOUSANDS OF FIRST RESPONDERS. WE REDUCED THE HOMELESS POPULATION BY MORE THAN 50% AND HAVE JUST CLOSED TWO SHELTERS. WE HAVE MADE OUR PARKWAYS SAFER WITH INCREASED POLICE PATROLS. WE BECAME THE FIRST COUNTY IN THE NATION TO MONITOR SEX OFFENDERS 24/7 WITH GPS BRACELETS. AND, WE ALSO PRESERVED OVER 2,000 ACRES OF OPEN SPACE AND FUNDED OVER 1,500 UNITS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE MANY. SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF WESTCHESTER ARE CHANGING. OUR BABY BOOMERS ARE NOW TURNING 60, AND WE MUST MEET THE CHALLENGE OF A DIFFERENT AND GROWING SENIOR POPULATION. OUR IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IS INCREASING RAPIDLY, AND WE MUST MAKE SURE THEY ARE INCLUDED AND ACCEPTED IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND CAN PARTICIPATE IN OUR WONDERFUL QUALITY OF LIFE.

WE HAVE CONTINUALLY FOCUSED ON KEEPING OUR RESIDENTS HEALTHY, BUT THERE ARE MORE ISSUES WE MUST ADDRESS: OBESITY IN CHILDREN AS WELL AS ADULTS, BEING PREPARED FOR A PANDEMIC OUTBREAK, ELIMINATING DISPARITIES IN MINORITY HEALTHCARE.

WE HAVE NEVER STRAYED FROM OUR GOAL TO HELP THOSE ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE BECOME SELF-RELIANT. NOR HAVE WE STRAYED FROM HELPING TROUBLED FAMILIES OR CHILDREN AT RISK. BUT NOW WE MUST FOCUS EVEN MORE ON IMPROVING CHILD WELFARE — TO BE SURE WE ARE NOT LETTING ONE CHILD FALL THROUGH A CRACK IN THE SYSTEM.

WE HAVE SPENT MILLIONS OF DOLLARS UPGRADING SECURITY, TRAINING RESPONDERS, BUYING EQUIPMENT AND ESTABLISHING PROTOCOLS TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC FROM MAN-MADE OR NATURE DRIVEN EMERGENCIES. BUT WE CANNOT REST ON OUR LAURELS. WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT IF DISASTER STRIKES, LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANS ARE UPDATED, OUR SPECIAL POPULATIONS ARE CARED FOR, AND OUR COMMUNICATIONS METHODS ARE STATE OF THE ART.

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN COMMITTED TO THE CHILDREN OF WESTCHESTER, WITH PROGRAMS TO PROTECT THEM FROM GUNS, ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND INTERNET PREDATORS AS WELL AS FROM BECOMING A STATISTIC ON OUR HIGHWAYS. NOW WE HAVE TO HELP EDUCATE THE PARENTS TO INCREASE THEIR AWARENESS OF HOW THE INTERNET CAN SOMETIMES PUT THEIR KIDS AT RISK.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY MUST CONTINUE TO BE A PLACE WHERE ALL PEOPLE ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND GIVEN A CHANCE TO SUCCEED. WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT TOLERANCE, DECENCY AND RESPECT ARE THE HALLMARKS OF WHAT ALL AMERICANS STAND FOR.

WE CANNOT TURN OUR BACKS ON TROUBLED YOUNGSTERS.

WE CANNOT TURN OUR BACKS ON HARD-WORKING IMMIGRANTS ... OR THE DISABLED ... OR THE HOMELESS.

WE WILL NOT STAND FOR HAVING RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS DEFILED OR HATE LITERATURE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS.

WE WILL NOT TOLERATE HAVING HOME BUYERS STEERED TO CERTAIN AREAS ... AND AWAY FROM OTHERS.

THIS IS NOT THE WESTCHESTER I WANT FOR THE FUTURE. THIS IS NOT THE LESSON I WANT OUR CHILDREN TO LEARN. WESTCHESTER COUNTY IS BETTER THAN THIS. AS LONG AS I AM COUNTY EXECUTIVE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT AND ADVOCATE FOR THOSE CHILDREN WHO NEED SPECIAL HELP. WE WILL CONTINUE TO GIVE THE HOMELESS THE TOOLS TO BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT. WE WILL CONTINUE TO ROOT OUT DISCRIMINATION WHEREVER IT APPEARS. AND WE WILL FIGHT TO GIVE ALL OUR RESIDENTS THE RESPECT AND DIGNITY THEY DESERVE.

LET'S NOT FORGET FOR A MOMENT THAT ALL OUR ANCESTORS WERE IMMIGRANTS. THEY ALL CAME HERE IN SEARCH FOR A BETTER LIFE OR FOR RELIGIOUS OR POLITICAL FREEDOM. LET US NOT STIFLE THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR OTHERS. WE NEED LESS INTOLERANCE AND MORE UNDERSTANDING. AND, WE NEED THE CLERGY, COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS, AND POLITICIANS TO CONTINUE TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST INJUSTICE.

FOR EIGHT YEARS I HAVE CONCENTRATED ON SAFEGUARDING OUR RESIDENTS. TONIGHT, YOU ARE GOING TO HEAR EVEN MORE NEW INITIATIVES — DESIGNED TO PROTECT EVERYONE — NO MATTER WHERE THEY WERE BORN, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR INCOME, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR AGE. AS IN THE PAST, OUR NEW INITIATIVES WILL CONTINUE TO PUT WESTCHESTER FRONT AND CENTER AS A MODEL FOR COUNTIES AROUND THE COUNTRY.

WE HAVE SEEN TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE DIE OR BE INJURED IN CAR ACCIDENTS THIS PAST YEAR. NO LIFE, MUCH LESS A YOUNG ONE, SHOULD BE WASTED IN THIS WAY. OUR COUNTY PARKWAY POLICE ARE STOPPING MORE AND MORE IMPAIRED DRIVERS. DWI ARRESTS IN 2005 INCREASED 34% OVER 2004, WHICH WAS ON TOP OF A 33% INCREASE FROM 2003. DRIVING WHILE DRUGGED ARRESTS INCREASED AN ASTOUNDING 81%. WE WILL NOT LET UP ON THESE EFFORTS. I WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE CAPTAIN JOHN HODGES, SERGEANT BRIAN HESS AND POLICE OFFICER ROBERT KELLY WHO ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO KEEP OUR PARKWAYS SAFE.

WHILE IT IS RELATIVELY EASY FOR THE POLICE TO DETECT A DRIVER UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL, IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE IF THE IMPAIRMENT IS DRUG RELATED. THAT'S WHY WE DEVELOPED, WITH THE WESTCHESTER CHIEFS ASSOCIATION, A COUNTY-WIDE STRATEGY TO TRAIN AND DEPLOY MORE POLICE AS CERTIFIED DRUG RECOGNITION EXPERTS. NEXT MONTH THE FIRST INTENSIVE TRAINING SESSION FOR 31 POLICE OFFICERS WILL BE HELD AT THE POLICE ACADEMY. ONCE CERTIFIED, THESE OFFICERS CAN TEST AT THE SCENE TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE DRIVER IS DRUG-IMPAIRED.

I AM DELIGHTED THAT DISTRICT ATTORNEY JANET DIFIORE IS PARTICIPATING IN THIS DRUG RECOGNITION PROGRAM FROM A PROSECUTION PERSPECTIVE. IT IS JUST ONE OF MANY PROJECTS BETWEEN OUR OFFICES THAT YOU WILL BE HEARING MORE ABOUT.

YOU WILL ALSO BE SEEING OUR TWO NEW "DRIVING SIMULATORS" IN HIGH SCHOOLS AND POLICE DEPARTMENTS AROUND THE COUNTY. BY STEPPING INSIDE, A PERSON WILL FEEL THE EFFECTS THAT ALCOHOL AND DRUG INTOXICATION, SPEED, AND EVEN BAD ROAD CONDITIONS HAVE ON A DRIVER. THIS NEW SAFETY TOOL WILL ALSO BE USED IN TRAINING NEW POLICE RECRUITS. WHILE WE PURCHASED THE SIMULATORS TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG DRIVERS TO BE RESPONSIBLE, I BELIEVE ALL DRIVERS SHOULD HAVE THIS EXPERIENCE.

EARLIER THIS MONTH, OUR DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION RECEIVED THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION'S PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD FOR 2005. WE WERE CHOSEN FOR THIS NATIONAL AWARD BECAUSE OF OUR SUCCESS IN KEEPING THOSE ON DWI PROBATION FROM REPEATING OFFENSES. THIS 14 MEMBER DWI ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM, WHICH OVERSEES 1300 CASES, USES A VARIETY OF INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES. OPERATION NIGHT WATCH IS ONE OF THEM, WHERE SURPRISE VISITS TO PROBATIONERS ARE CONDUCTED TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE SOBER AND OFF THE ROAD.

I AM PLEASED TO WELCOME TONIGHT PROBATION OFFICERS FRANK GARCIA, HELENE HODAPP, JUAN SIERRA, TERRENCE GORMAN, SHERYL DAY, ROBERT GRADY, ONEIDA GARCIA AND CHARLES COTTON; SUPERVISING PROBATION OFFICERS ROBERT WATSON AND EDWARD DRENGA, AND ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER JAMES O'SHEA.

I AM VERY PROUD OF THIS DEPARTMENT. WHILE OUR POLICE AND FIREFIGHTERS GET A LOT OF ATTENTION, AND RIGHTLY SO, OUR PROBATION OFFICERS ARE UNSUNG HEROES WITHIN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. THEY ARE OUT THERE EVERYDAY, PROTECTING US WITH STRENGTH AND CREATIVITY.

I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE SEVERAL NEW INITIATIVES THAT YOU WILL SEE THIS YEAR. GROWING OUT OF OUR SUCCESSFUL PROTECT THE KIDS PROGRAM, THE DEPARTMENTS OF PROBATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY WILL BEGIN SOS — SEX OFFENDER SURVEILLANCE, WHERE OFFICERS WILL BE MORE INTRUSIVE IN THE LIVES OF SEX OFFENDERS ON PROBATION WHO TRY TO KEEP THEIR ACTIVITIES SECRET.

IN ADDITION, BOTH DEPARTMENTS AS WELL AS THE DA'S OFFICE AND THE OFFICE FOR WOMEN HAVE COME UP WITH A NEW TRAINING PROGRAM CALLED MANAGING SEX OFFENDERS IN THE COMMUNITY. IT IS DESIGNED TO GUIDE POLICE OFFICERS IN UNDERSTANDING "MEGAN'S LAW" AND WHEN AND HOW TO NOTIFY LOCAL SCHOOLS AND OTHER AGENCIES WHEN SEX OFFENDERS LIVE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

AS LONG AS THESE SEXUAL PREDATORS ARE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS, I WILL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO PROTECT WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THAT'S WAY I STARTED THE ELECTRONIC MONITORING OF SEX OFFENDERS ON PROBATION. HOWEVER, WHAT WE NEED IS FOR THE STATE LEGISLATURE TO PASS A CIVIL CONFINEMENT LAW, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT THE COURTS HAVE UPHELD THE GOVERNOR'S POSITION TO KEEP THESE DANGEROUS PREDATORS OFF THE STREETS AFTER THEY ARE RELEASED FROM PRISON. AND, WHAT WE NEED IS FOR THE GOVERNOR TO MAKE SURE THAT THESE SEX OFFENDERS SERVE THEIR FULL JAIL SENTENCES AND ARE NOT RELEASED EARLY ON PAROLE — WHICH IS HAPPENING ALL TOO FREQUENTLY.

WHEN IT COMES TO KEEPING OUR RESIDENTS SAFE, I WILL EXPLORE EVERY ALTERNATIVE. THAT'S WHY I AM ANNOUNCING TONIGHT A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR DEPARTMENTS OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND PROBATION WITH THE U.S. MARSHAL'S REGIONAL FUGITIVE TASK FORCE TO FIND AND APPREHEND WESTCHESTER'S MOST WANTED. THIS GREW OUT OF A PILOT PROJECT, GIVING US THE EXHAUSTIVE RESOURCES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, THAT ENABLED THE CAPTURE OF 32 FUGITIVES FROM JUSTICE — SOME WHO HAD ELUDED LAW ENFORCEMENT FOR OVER 30 YEARS BY MOVING TO OTHER STATES OR BY USING ALIASES.

TO GET THE PUBLIC'S ASSISTANCE IN THIS EFFORT, YOU WILL SOON FIND "WARRANT WATCH" ON OUR WEBSITE WHICH WILL CONTAIN PHOTOGRAPHS AND INFORMATION ON OTHER FUGITIVES WE ARE LOOKING FOR. WE KNOW THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT WORKS BEST WHEN THE PUBLIC IS INVOLVED. IF YOUR BOARD PASSES THE LEGISLATION I HAVE SUBMITTED, THERE WILL BE A MONETARY REWARD FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THEIR ARREST.

AS THE NATIONAL MEDIA REPORTED LAST YEAR, WESTCHESTER WAS THE FIRST IN THE COUNTRY TO IMPLEMENT 24 HOUR GPS MONITORING OF SEX OFFENDERS ON PROBATION—TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE NOT IN PLACES WHERE THEY ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE. AND, ALSO, TO LET THEM KNOW WE ARE WATCHING THEM.

THIS YEAR, THE GPS PROGRAM WILL BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE THOSE CONVICTED OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. HOWEVER, AS IN THE MONITORING OF SEX OFFENDERS, PROBATION CAN ONLY RECOMMEND; THE COURT ALONE HAS POWER TO ORDER IT. I AM ASKING JUDGE NICOLAI TONIGHT, TO DO ALL WITHIN HIS POWER TO URGE THE JUDGES IN THE 9TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT TO BE MORE PRO-ACTIVE AND AGGRESSIVE IN REQUIRING THIS MONITORING. WITHOUT THEIR WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT'S RECOMMENDATIONS, WE CANNOT BE AS EFFECTIVE AS WE WANT TO BE IN KEEPING WOMEN AND CHILDREN SAFE.

AT THE SAME TIME, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK JUDGE NICOLAI, D.A. DiFIORE, SENATOR NICK SPANO AND MY PROTECT THE KIDS COMMITTEE FOR WORKING TO ESTABLISH THE NEW SEX OFFENDER COURT. WE FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THIS NEW COURT WILL HELP VICTIMS, ENHANCE JUDICIAL EXPERTISE, AND IMPROVE SENTENCE CONSISTENCY.

WHEN IT COMES TO COMBATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, I BELIEVE EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY, AND A NEW PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT RELEASED THIS MONTH RAISES AWARENESS TO THAT FACT. WE ARE ALSO ABOUT TO EXPAND OUR ELECTRONIC ORDERS OF PROTECTION PROGRAM TO INCLUDE FOUR MORE POLICE DEPARTMENTS. I WANT TO THANK TUCKAHOE, SLEEPY HOLLOW, OSSINING TOWN AND PORT CHESTER FOR JOINING WITH WHITE PLAINS WHO FIRST PILOTTED THIS PROJECT AND HAS HELPED WITH THE EXPANSION. I ENCOURAGE OTHER LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS TO PARTICIPATE AS WELL.

A MILESTONE WAS REACHED LAST YEAR, WHEN YOUR BOARD PASSED THE HUMAN RIGHTS AMENDMENT I INTRODUCED TO PROTECT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS FROM BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN THE WORKPLACE AND IN HOUSING. ONCE AGAIN, WE WERE LEADERS IN THE FIELD. WESTCHESTER BECAME THE FIRST COUNTY IN THE STATE AND ONE OF THE FEW IN THE NATION TO OFFER THIS PROTECTION. THIS YEAR, WE WILL BEGIN AN EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ADVOCACY AGENCIES TO SEND VICTIMS TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION FOR RELIEF.

I WANT TO TALK ABOUT OUR CHILDREN — ESPECIALLY THOSE AT RISK. SINCE I TOOK OFFICE IN 1998, THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES HAS COME A LONG WAY TO IMPROVE CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS IN WHICH 8000 CHILDREN ARE NOW SERVED ANNUALLY. FROM FOSTER CARE TO CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES, PROGRAMS, SUPERVISION, OPERATIONS AND OVERSIGHT HAVE BEEN ENHANCED AND REINFORCED. ALL OF THE NEW INITIATIVES INCLUDING THE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LIAISON PROGRAM, AND THE ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM ARE DESIGNED TO TRY TO PREVENT ANY CHILD IN WESTCHESTER FROM BEING ABUSED OR NEGLECTED.

BUT, EVEN AS WE ARE PLEASED BY POSITIVE EVALUATIONS BY THE CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE, MORE HAS TO BE DONE AND, IN FACT, WILL BE DONE. EVERY CHILD'S CASE IS URGENT. EVERY CHILD'S CASE NEEDS UNDIVIDED ATTENTION. I DO NOT WANT TO SEE ANOTHER TRAGEDY IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY. I DO NOT WANT TO SEE CRUELTY AND VIOLENCE TOWARDS OUR MOST VULNERABLE. THEREFORE, I AM ANNOUNCING TONIGHT A REORGANIZATION OF THE CHILD WELFARE DIVISION.

FROM NOW ON, THE FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER'S SOLE RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE CHILD WELFARE. REPORTING TO HER WILL BE THREE NEW DIRECTORS, EACH OVERSEEING A DIFFERENT DISTRICT OFFICE. REPORTING TO EACH DIRECTOR WILL BE ADDITIONAL MANAGERS AND CASEWORKERS. YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY PREVIOUSLY THAT WE WILL BE ADDING 30 NEW STAFF POSITIONS, WHICH WILL ENABLE US TO REDUCE CASE LOADS WHILE WE REORGANIZE. WE WILL ALSO CHANGE OUR OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE SO THAT MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS CAN PROVIDE GREATER OVERSIGHT, TEACHING AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES, SO THAT NO CHILD FALLS BETWEEN THE CRACKS.

MOREOVER, DSS WILL ESTABLISH AN "OVERFLOW" UNIT, TO KEEP CASELOADS FOR CURRENT WORKERS AT OPTIMAL LEVELS. AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE CONDUCTING A WORKLOAD STUDY TO DETERMINE HOW BEST TO PARCEL OUT CASES BASED ON THEIR DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY.

WE ARE ALSO MAKING A CONCERTED EFFORT TO HIRE EVEN MORE BI-LINGUAL WORKERS. IN A COUNTY AS DIVERSE AS OURS, IT IS VITAL THAT OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITY RECEIVES ASSISTANCE FROM EMPLOYEES WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR CULTURE AND SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE.

AT THE SAME TIME, DSS HAS JUST BEGUN A PILOT PROJECT WITH OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, TO HAVE POLICE OFFICERS TRAIN OUR CHILD WELFARE STAFF ON HOW TO BETTER CONDUCT INVESTIGATIONS. WE EXPECT TO ROLL OUT THE PROGRAM TO ALL STAFF BY THE SUMMER AND THE OFFICERS WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY AN ADVISORY ROLE.

IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS, WE WOULD BE ABLE TO PREVENT ANY TRAGEDY. UNFORTUNATELY, TRY AS WE MIGHT, THAT IS UNREALISTIC. BUT THAT SHOULD NOT STOP US FROM CONSTANTLY MAKING IMPROVEMENTS. WE SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID TO SAY, "WE NEED TO DO BETTER." WORKING WITH FAMILIES COMMITTEE CHAIR JUDY MYERS, WE WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN.

THE INAUGURATION OF DISTRICT ATTORNEY DiFIORE HAS USHERED IN A FRESH NEW SPIRIT OF COOPERATION. NOWHERE IS THIS MORE VISIBLE THAN IN THE AREAS OF CHILD ABUSE. WITH HER ASSISTANCE, GUIDANCE AND EXPERIENCE, WE WILL HAVE NEW TOOLS AT OUR DISPOSAL: THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM AND THE CHILD FATALITY REVIEW TEAM.

WHILE THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM WAS, IN FACT, CONCEIVED AND IMPLEMENTED OVER TWO YEARS AGO AND CONSISTED OF LAW ENFORCEMENT, COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND CHILD AND VICTIM ADVOCACY AGENCIES, IT WAS NOT FULLY FUNCTIONAL BECAUSE THE D.A.'S OFFICE WAS NOT A PARTICIPANT.

WITH D.A. DiFIORE'S DECISION TO SERVE AS AN INTEGRAL MEMBER, THE TEAM WILL BE FAR MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE IN CHILD ABUSE REVIEW. ITS COORDINATED APPROACH WILL MEAN LESS TRAUMA ON THE YOUNG VICTIMS INTERVIEWED, CRITICAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT FOR AT RISK FAMILIES AND, FINALLY, MORE SEAMLESS AND SUCCESSFUL PROSECUTION OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE.

OUR ON-GOING EFFORTS TO CREATE A CHILD FATALITY REVIEW TEAM HAVE RECEIVED MUCH PUBLICITY. FINALLY, AND BECAUSE OF THE COOPERATION OF D.A. DiFiore, THIS TEAM HAS BECOME A REALITY AND IS THE FOURTH OF ITS KIND IN THE STATE. INITIALLY FUNDED BY A \$125,000 STATE GRANT, THE CHILD FATALITY REVIEW TEAM HAS BEEN ASSEMBLED TO ADDRESS THE BRUTAL FACT THAT IN RARE CASES, DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF FAMILIES, SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, CHILDREN WILL LOSE THEIR LIVES TO ABUSE OR NEGLECT.

BUILDING UPON EXISTING POLICIES WHICH REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TO INVESTIGATE THE DEATH OF ANY FOSTER CARE CHILD OR ONE WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF AN ABUSE ALLEGATION, THIS OBJECTIVE TEAM CAN INVESTIGATE THE DEATH OF ANY CHILD IN WESTCHESTER UNDER VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. THEY WILL ALSO ISSUE A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON THE CONTRIBUTING CIRCUMSTANCES AND CAUSES, AS WELL AS ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO PREVENT FUTURE TRAGEDIES.

GIVEN THE ENERGY, EXPERTISE AND COMMITMENT OF BOTH THESE TEAMS, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THEY WILL LEAD THE WAY IN HELPING TO PREVENT ABUSE, NEGLECT AND FATALITIES OF CHILDREN IN OUR COUNTY.

PROTECTING CHILDREN COMES IN MANY FORMS. SOMETIMES IT MEANS EDUCATING PARENTS. SOMETIMES IT MEANS GIVING YOUNGSTERS POSITIVE EXPERIENCES. AND, SOMETIMES IT MEANS GETTING WHOLE COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS INVOLVED WITH THE HOPE THAT POTENTIAL CRIMINAL OR VIOLENT BEHAVIOR CAN BE PREVENTED.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, D.A. DiFiore AND I HOSTED AN ALL-DAY GANG SUMMIT WHICH BROUGHT TOGETHER OVER 500 SCHOOL OFFICIALS, LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONALS AND AGENCIES THAT DEAL WITH YOUTH. WHILE SOME MAY NOT WANT TO ADMIT IT, VIOLENCE AND GANG ACTIVITY ARE NOT JUST IN URBAN AREAS; THEY ARE ALL OVER THE COUNTY, AND IT IS BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM. OUR YOUTH BUREAU TOOK THE LEAD IN THIS INITIATIVE WHICH FOCUSED ON PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION AS WELL AS ENFORCEMENT.

THE SUMMIT STRESSED WHY SOME KIDS FIND GANGS ATTRACTIVE: PROTECTION, PEER PRESSURE, EXCITEMENT, A SENSE OF IDENTITY AND IMPORTANCE. PARTICIPANTS ALSO LEARNED FROM THE EXPERTS, THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT. NOW, WE NEED TO JOIN TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES THAT WE WILL LEARN FROM TALKING TO THE KIDS THEMSELVES — THE ONES WHO HAVE STAYED AWAY FROM GANGS, THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT GANGS AND YES, THOSE WHO ARE STILL INVOLVED. WHILE OUR EFFORTS WILL FOCUS ON DETERRING KIDS FROM JOINING GANGS AND HELP THOSE WHO WANT TO LEAVE THEM, THE DA’S MESSAGE IS LOUD AND CLEAR: GANG MEMBERS WILL BE DEALT WITH HARSHLY — ARRESTED AND PROSECUTED IF THERE IS A CRIME.

NEXT MONTH WE WILL HAVE AN INTERNET CYBER-SAFETY CONFERENCE FOR PARENTS. EVERY TIME WE THINK WE HAVE HANDLED ONE ISSUE, ANOTHER POPS UP. THERE’S NO DOUBT THE YOUNGER GENERATION IS LEADING US WHEN IT COMES TO NEW WAYS TO CONVERSE. FIRST IT WAS EMAIL, THEN, INSTANT MESSAGING. NOW IT’S BLOGGING AND LIVE JOURNALS.

MOST OF THE TIME, THESE METHODS ARE WONDERFUL WAYS TO COMMUNICATE. BUT NOT ALL THE TIME. I BELIEVE PARENTS NEED TO BE AWARE OF POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES SO THEY CAN TALK TO THEIR CHILDREN. WE ALL KNOW THAT KIDS LIKE PRIVACY AND THEY DESERVE IT. WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF WHAT THEIR CHILDREN ARE DOING, PARENTS CAN STRIKE A COMFORTABLE BALANCE. THE CONFERENCE ON MAY 9TH AGAIN FEATURES PARRY AFTAB, THE RENOWNED INTERNET SAFETY EXPERT WHO CONDUCTED OUR SUCCESSFUL CYBERBULLYING CONFERENCE LAST YEAR. PARRY IS WITH US TONIGHT — THANK YOU FOR HELPING KIDS AND EDUCATING PARENTS ALL OVER THE WORLD ABOUT SAFE INTERNET USE.

WHEN IT COMES TO INTERNET SECURITY, THERE SEEMS TO BE A NEW SCAM, VIRUS, OR METHOD OF IDENTITY THEFT THAT SPROUTS UP DAILY. WHILE THE NATIONAL FOCUS HAS BEEN TO CATCH THE CULPRITS AFTER THEY HAVE COMMITTED THE CRIME, THE GROUNDBREAKING LEGISLATION I SIGNED LAST WEEK MAKES WESTCHESTER THE FIRST IN THE NATION TO REQUIRE BUSINESSES TO SECURE THEIR WIRELESS NETWORKS TO HELP PREVENT IDENTITY THEFT. JUST AS IMPORTANT, THE LAW REQUIRES THAT INTERNET CAFES POST SIGNS WARNING CUSTOMERS TO PROTECT THEIR OWN COMPUTERS WHEN USING A PUBLIC WI-FI NETWORK. WE WILL NOT MAKE IT EASY FOR DRIVE-BY HACKERS TO MALICIOUSLY STEAL PERSONAL INFORMATION FROM WI-FI CONNECTIONS.

THERE IS A LAW ENFORCEMENT COMPONENT TO THIS AS WELL. OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY WILL SOON HAVE THE ONLY ACCREDITED DIGITAL EVIDENCE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT IN THE STATE THAT WILL SEARCH THE NET FOR THOSE WHO TRY TO STEAL OUR IDENTITY, TRICK US WITH CON ARTIST SCHEMES, OR ATTEMPT TO HURT OUR CHILDREN

OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE DATA WAREHOUSE IS NOW SHARED BY 14 LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND HAS A DATABASE OF OVER 1 MILLION RECORDS. WE'VE ALL SEEN THE "MIRACLES" ON CSI. THEY HAVE NOTHING ON US. USING THIS TECHNOLOGY, POLICE HAVE ENTERED WHATEVER INFORMATION THEY HAVE — HOWEVER LIMITED IT MAY BE — A NICKNAME OR TATTOO — AND FOUND A MATCH TO MAKE AN ARREST.

OUR NEW DNA LAB, WHICH WILL BE COMPLETED NEXT YEAR, WILL BE ONE OF THE FEW IN THE COUNTRY THAT WILL HAVE THE ABILITY TO ANALYZE A SPECIAL TYPE OF DNA. THIS WILL MAKE IT EASIER TO CONNECT COMPLEX, EVEN DECOMPOSED EVIDENCE TO SOLVE CURRENT CRIMES AND COLD CASES. THE DEPARTMENT OF LABS AND RESEARCH WILL ALSO EXPAND ITS BIO-DEFENSE LAB. THIS MEANS THAT PUBLIC HEALTH THREATS — FROM BIRD FLU TO CHEMICAL AGENTS — CAN BE MORE QUICKLY AND EASILY IDENTIFIED. I WANT TO THANK THE BOARD OF LEGISLATORS FOR SUPPORTING THESE NEW CAPITAL PROJECTS FOR A DEPARTMENT THAT IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PLAYER IN KEEPING WESTCHESTER SAFE AND HEALTHY.

THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY CONTINUES TO PROVIDE RESOURCES TO THE LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS. LAST YEAR ALONE, COUNTY POLICE LOGGED OVER 69,000 HOURS IN SERVICES TO MUNICIPALITIES; A MONETARY EQUIVALENT VALUE OF \$7.5 MILLION DOLLARS.

THIS YEAR WE WILL BEGIN A NEW MOUNTED PATROL UNIT FOR CROWD CONTROL SITUATIONS. ANOTHER RESOURCE FOR LOCAL DEPARTMENTS, IT WILL ALSO PROVIDE SAFETY AT MAJOR EVENTS IN COUNTY PARKS, AND IN THE CASE OF A LARGE-SCALE EMERGENCY. IN SEPTEMBER, WE WILL RECEIVE OUR NEW HELICOPTER THAT WILL HELP EVERY LOCAL FIRST RESPONDER DEPARTMENT. THE NEW CHOPPER WILL HAVE CAPABILITY FOR MEDICAL EVACUATION, FIRE FIGHTING, SEARCH AND RESCUE, PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT TRANSPORT AS WELL AS OBSERVATION AND SURVEILLANCE.

WHEN IT COMES TO MANAGING EMERGENCIES, AN IMMEDIATE AND COORDINATED RESPONSE IS ONE OF OUR GREATEST CHALLENGES, AND WE HAVE SPARED NO EXPENSE IN TRAINING AND EQUIPPING FIRST RESPONDERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY. THIS YEAR WE WILL CONTINUE TO ENHANCE OUR ALL HAZARDS RESPONSE PLAN, ADDING ADDITIONAL COMPONENTS FOR EVACUATION OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THOSE WITH PETS. WE HAVE ALREADY DEVISED PROTOCOLS FOR A PANDEMIC FLU OUTBREAK AND HAVE OUR HOSPITALS ON A 24 HOUR COMPUTERIZED SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM TO DETERMINE EMERGING DISEASE PATTERNS.

VITAL TO HANDLING ANY EMERGENCY IS A COMPREHENSIVE AND REDUNDANT COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM. TOWARD THAT END, WE CREATED THE COUNTY EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM. USING THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, WE CAN NOW EMAIL, TEXT MESSAGE OR CALL WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES AND NON-PROFITS IN CASE OF A MAJOR DISASTER. I URGE EVERY RESIDENT, TO LOG ON TO WESTCHESTERGOV.COM AND SIGN UP FOR THIS NOTIFICATION. OVER 10,000 PEOPLE ALREADY HAVE. IF SOMETHING IS HAPPENING HERE, EVEN IF YOU WORK OUTSIDE THE COUNTY, YOU WILL WANT TO KNOW ABOUT IT. WE ALSO HAVE THE ABILITY TO TARGET COMMUNICATION TO ONE OR SEVERAL GEOGRAPHIC AREAS.

EMERGENCIES AS WE ALL KNOW, DO NOT RESPECT POLITICAL BOUNDARIES. BY HAVING PROPERLY TRAINED AND EQUIPPED POLICE, FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS IN OUR COMMUNITIES, WE HAVE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO SAVE LIVES AND LIMIT CASUALTIES. WHILE WE HAVE RECEIVED AND DISTRIBUTED NEARLY \$9 MILLION DOLLARS IN HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDS SINCE 2002, I DO NOT BELIEVE WE ARE GETTING OUR FAIR SHARE. AS A COUNTY WITH A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT, A DAM THAT SUPPLIES WATER FOR ALL OF NEW YORK CITY AND WESTCHESTER, AND MAJOR FORTUNE 500 CORPORATIONS, I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY WE GET LESS PER CAPITA THAN PLACES IN WYOMING, FOR EXAMPLE, WHERE THERE ARE FEW, IF ANY, TERRORIST THREATS.

THIS YEAR, OUR GOAL IS TO FURTHER ASSIST OUR MUNICIPALITIES WITH THEIR LOCAL RESPONSE PLANS, AND HELP THEM SET UP THEIR OWN EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTERS. WE WILL ALSO TRAIN LOCAL FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, A FEDERAL REQUIREMENT TO RECEIVE HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING. THIS WILL ENSURE THAT THE BEST POSSIBLE COORDINATED RESPONSE IS PROVIDED TO KEEP OUR RESIDENTS SAFE. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH NEW PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE CHAIR BILL BURTON JUST AS I DID WITH FORMER LEGISLATOR RICHARD WISHNIE TO PROTECT OUR RESIDENTS.

THIS PAST JANUARY THOUSANDS OF WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS WERE WITHOUT ELECTRIC POWER — SOME FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS; OTHERS FOR MUCH LONGER. WHILE WE CONTINUE TO WORK WITH CON EDISON AND NYSEG TO IMPROVE THEIR EMERGENCY RESPONSES, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE COUNTY EMPLOYEES WHO STAFF OUR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER. IN THE 24 HOUR PERIOD OF THE STORM, OUR DISPATCHERS HANDLED FOUR TIMES THE AVERAGE AMOUNT OF CALLS AND DISPATCHED 711 CALLS TO FIRE DEPARTMENTS AND 128 TO EMS AGENCIES.

THESE STAFFERS, AS YOU KNOW, ARE ALSO TRAINED IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL DISPATCH TO COACH CALLERS TO CARE FOR PATIENTS UNTIL THE AMBULANCE OR FIRE TRUCKS ARRIVE. I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THOSE WHO ARE WITH US TONIGHT — WILLIAM ARDUINO, RAYMOND STRETZ, ALISON TRAVIS, WILLIAM ODELL AND DIVISION CHIEF MIKE VOLK. YOUR DEDICATION AND EXPERTISE MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN WHATEVER EMERGENCY WE MAY FACE.

WHEN IT COMES TO KEEPING WESTCHESTER HEALTHY, THE MEDICAL CENTER CONTINUES TO PROVIDE OUTSTANDING CARE TO MORE THAN 150,000 CHILDREN AND ADULTS EVERY YEAR — THE REGION'S TOUGHEST CASES: KIDNEY, LIVER AND HEART TRANSPLANTS; BABIES BORN WITH ONLY THE SLIMMEST CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL; AND CRITICALLY INJURED TRAUMA AND BURN VICTIMS WHO ARE FLOWN HERE FROM THROUGHOUT THE REGION.

I AM SO PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THIS HOSPITAL IS HEADED IN A NEW DIRECTION — THE RIGHT DIRECTION. BY HELPING OUT FINANCIALLY, WE GAVE THE MEDICAL CENTER OUR VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. AND THEY HAVE RETURNED THAT CONFIDENCE BY CHARTING A NEW COURSE; ADDING NEW PHYSICIANS AND NURSES, THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, AND STREAMLINING OPERATIONS TO MAKE ROOM FOR MORE PATIENTS, ADDITIONAL SERVICES AND A NEW CRITICAL AND INTENSIVE CARE CENTER. MIKE ISRAEL, THE MEDICAL CENTER'S CEO IS HERE TONIGHT. MIKE, YOU HAVE DONE AN INCREDIBLE JOB.

I WANT TO THANK THE DOCTORS, NURSES, AND ALL WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER EMPLOYEES FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND DEVOTION TO THEIR JOBS. THEY SAVE LIVES, CHANGE LIVES, AND MAKE LIVES BETTER EVERY DAY. I ALSO WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE COURAGE AND ASSISTANCE OF CHAIRMAN BILL RYAN AND THE BOARD OF LEGISLATORS FOR STANDING WITH ME TO SUPPORT THE HOSPITAL.

THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT STATE SUPPORT IS ALSO POSITIVE. LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE FUNDING THROUGH A CHANGE IN MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT HAS PASSED THE ASSEMBLY, AND THE STATE SENATE WILL SOON DO THE SAME. I AM HOPEFUL THAT THE GOVERNOR WILL SIGN THE BILL, SINCE HE HAS STATED HOW VITAL HE BELIEVES THE MEDICAL CENTER TO BE.

WHEN IT COMES TO UNFUNDED STATE MANDATES, WE WERE SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING ALBANY TO ABSORB MOST OF THE COSTS OF FUTURE MEDICAID INCREASES. HOWEVER, TO PROVIDE FURTHER PROPERTY TAX RELIEF, THE STATE MUST CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE COUNTIES TO CONTROL THE COSTS OF OTHER UNFUNDED MANDATES.

ON THE COUNTY LEVEL, AND WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS CHAIR MIKE KAPLOWITZ, WE WILL CONTINUE TO TIGHTEN OUR OWN BUDGET BELT. WE WILL ELIMINATE THE BUREAU OF PURCHASE AND SUPPLY, CONTINUE TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF ACCRUED OVERTIME HOURS, AND USE OUR NEW OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PREVENT FRAUD AND ABUSE BY COUNTY EMPLOYEES. SPEAKING OF FRAUD, WE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THE STATE TO WORK WITH US TO CRACK DOWN ON MEDICAID FRAUD THROUGH A PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING, AUDITING AND PROSECUTING PROVIDERS WHO HAVE BEEN CHEATING THE SYSTEM.

WHEN IT COMES TO OUR DEPARTMENTS OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH, WE ARE CONSISTENTLY MEETING NEW CHALLENGES. APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH AND THREE WEEKS AGO WE UNVEILED NEW WEBSITES TO HELP PARENTS ACCESS SERVICES AND RESOURCES. WITH ONE IN 166 CHILDREN BEING DIAGNOSED TODAY, AS OPPOSED TO ONE IN 10,000 JUST 13 YEARS AGO, AUTISM IS MORE COMMON THAN PEDIATRIC CANCER, DIABETES, AND AIDS COMBINED. IT AFFECTS THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FABRIC OF EVERY FAMILY WITH AN AUTISTIC CHILD.

WHILE WESTCHESTER CAN OFFER SUPPORT TO HELP FAMILIES COPE, MORE MUST BE DONE ON A FEDERAL LEVEL. IN MY CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVES OF AMERICA, I HAVE ASKED MY COLLEAGUES AROUND THE COUNTRY TO CONTACT THEIR REPRESENTATIVES TO SUPPORT FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO DOUBLE THE CURRENT FUNDING STREAM TO \$176 MILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY FOR AUTISM RESEARCH, SCREENING AND INTERVENTION.

WE CONTINUE TO BE A MODEL FOR THE NATION WHEN IT COMES TO PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. WHETHER IT IS TO GET HOMELESS PEOPLE SELF-SUFFICIENT AFTER DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE, HELP CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS TO FUNCTION MORE SUCCESSFULLY, OR FIND ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION FOR THOSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS WHO ARE CONVICTED OF NON-VIOLENT CRIMES, OUR DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH IS THERE. IT IS SO HIGHLY REGARDED THAT WE WERE DESIGNATED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AS A TEAM LEARNING CENTER, ONE OF ONLY THREE IN THE NATION. MENTAL HEALTH STAFF FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY WILL COME TO OBSERVE AND LEARN FROM OUR SYSTEM OF SERVICES.

OUR HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONTINUES TO FOCUS ON A WIDE VARIETY OF PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES THAT AFFECT CHILDREN AS WELL AS ADULTS. I BELIEVE ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES WE FACE IS THE RISE IN DIABETES ESPECIALLY IN HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN. THEREFORE, I HAVE DIRECTED THAT THIS ADMINISTRATION UNDERTAKE A CONCERTED AND COMBINED EFFORT TO TRY TO CHANGE SOME LONG-STANDING HABITS, AND THIS BEGINS WITH COMBATING OBESITY.

I THANK ALL OUR PARTNERS IN THIS PROJECT: THE COUNTY YOUTH BUREAU, THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT, MY COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE, OUR DIRECTORS OF HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN AFFAIRS, THE WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER, CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, CHILD CARE COUNCIL, THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION AND THE AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION.

BUILDING ON OUR BEFIT PROGRAM, WE WILL MAKE SURE THAT ALL THE YOUTH AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS WE FUND ARE ENCOURAGED TO SERVE HEALTHY SNACKS. WE WILL REACH OUT TO THE FAITH-BASED NETWORK TO HELP EDUCATE ADULTS ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD, OBESITY AND DISEASE. WE WILL WORK WITH BODEGAS AND SUPERMARKETS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES. WITH THE COMBINED FORCES OF THESE IMPRESSIVE AGENCIES, I AM SURE WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

THIS EFFORT TO COMBAT DISEASE IN OUR MINORITY COMMUNITIES HAS GROWN OUT OF ANOTHER MAJOR INITIATIVE BEGUN LAST FALL: OUR BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON HEALTH DISPARITIES. COMPRISED OF KEY LEADERS FROM THE BLACK AND MEDICAL COMMUNITIES, THIS GROUP HAS FINALIZED ITS FIRST REPORT — AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF WHAT AND WHY THERE ARE DISPARITIES IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY — RANGING FROM ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND THE DISEASES THEMSELVES. I LOOK FORWARD TO THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS, AND THE INPUT FROM LEGISLATORS CLINTON YOUNG, ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS AND LOIS BRONZ, AS WE DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN.

MANY OF THESE SAME ISSUES ALSO EXIST IN THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY. SINCE MANY LATINOS HAVE THE ADDITIONAL BARRIER OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, I WILL COUNT ON THE ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE OF LEGISLATOR JOSE ALVARADO AND OUR HISPANIC ADVISORY BOARD TO HELP DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN FOR THIS COMMUNITY.

BY 2010, THE HISPANIC POPULATION, BOTH NATIVE AND FOREIGN BORN WILL COMPRISE 21% OF OUR POPULATION. WHILE THE CHILDREN ARE LEARNING ENGLISH, IN MANY CASES THE PARENTS ARE NOT. WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT THEY KNOW WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE AND HOW TO GET THE HELP THEY NEED. WHILE IT IS TO EVERYONE'S BENEFIT THAT OUR NEWEST IMMIGRANTS LEARN ENGLISH, UNTIL THEY DO, WE WILL CONTINUE TO REACH OUT TO THEM IN SPANISH AS WELL.

IN THE COMING MONTHS, THE DEPARTMENTS OF PROBATION, PUBLIC SAFETY AND HISPANIC AFFAIRS WILL ROLL OUT EL PROTECTOR. USING SPANISH SPEAKING OFFICERS FROM THESE DEPARTMENTS TO EDUCATE LATINOS ON DWI LAWS AND OVERALL TRAFFIC SAFETY, WE HOPE TO COMBAT THE CULTURAL IMAGE THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT IS THEIR ENEMY. THROUGH POSITIVE INTERACTION, CRIME, GANG PARTICIPATION AND ALCOHOL ABUSE CAN BE REDUCED.

ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I AM SO SUPPORTIVE OF WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S GATEWAY CENTER IS THAT IT WILL OFFER IMMIGRANT STUDENTS THE ACADEMIC, TECHNOLOGY, AND LANGUAGE SKILLS THEY NEED FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SUCCESS. THE CENTER IS SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN 2009.

AS WE CONTINUE TO HELP OUR "NEWER" AMERICANS ENJOY THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN WESTCHESTER, WE CANNOT FORGET OUR OLDER AMERICANS. WITH BABY BOOMERS NOW REACHING 60, SENIORS WILL COMPRISE OVER 19% OF OUR POPULATION IN 4 YEARS. WHILE MANY OF OUR OLDER RESIDENTS LIVE ALONE, ARE FRAIL, AND HAVE DECLINING INCOMES, THE BABY BOOMERS ARE STATISTICALLY HEALTHIER, BETTER EDUCATED, AND WANT TO KEEP WORKING. THIS IS GOOD NEWS, BUT OUR INITIATIVES HAVE TO REFLECT THIS DUALITY.

LAST DECEMBER, WESTCHESTER MADE ITS MOST DRAMATIC STRIDE IN BRINGING AGING ISSUES TO THE NATIONAL FOREFRONT. AT THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING, OUR RESOLUTIONS MADE THE TOP 10 LIST TO GO TO THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS TO GUIDE FUTURE POLICY DECISIONS. THE DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES WAS THE ONLY AGENCY IN THE NATION TO RECEIVE THE JOHNSON AND JOHNSON/ROSALYNN CARTER INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP AWARD, WHICH CAME WITH A \$40,000 GRANT TO STUDY INTERGENERATIONAL ISSUES.

WHEN THE MEDICARE PART D DEBACLE HIT, THE DEPARTMENT WAS READY TO HELP THE 127,000 WESTCHESTER SENIORS WHO WERE AFFECTED. IN A NATION FILLED WITH OLDER PEOPLE WHO SUDDENLY HAD NO IDEA OF WHERE TO GET THEIR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, 20,000 WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS WERE ASSISTED.

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE — AND I AM SURE LEGISLATOR BERNICE SPRECKMAN WILL AGREE — TO RECOGNIZE THE DEPARTMENT'S SWAT TEAM. SWAT STANDS FOR STAFF WORKING ALL THE TIME. I WOULD LIKE TO THANK LAURA BOLOTSKY, JEANNE PICI, MARY EDGAR-HERRERA, DOZENE GUISHARD AND COLETTE PHIPPS ALONG WITH VOLUNTEERS FLO BRODLEY AND TIM OBERG AND LOIS STEINBERG FROM THE MEDICARE RIGHTS CENTER. THEIR EFFORTS ALONG WITH OTHERS MADE SURE THAT NOT A SINGLE WESTCHESTER SENIOR WHO CALLED THE COUNTY WENT TO BED AT NIGHT WITHOUT HIS OR HER MEDICATION.

ONE MORE WORD: IF YOU ARE OVER 65 AND HAVE NOT YET ENROLLED IN A MEDICARE PART D PRESCRIPTION PLAN, YOU MUST DO SO BY MAY 15TH OR YOUR PREMIUMS WILL RISE. I URGE ALL THOSE TO CONTACT OUR DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR ASSISTANCE IN NAVIGATING THROUGH THIS QUAGMIRE OF A FEDERAL PROGRAM.

IN PLANNING AHEAD FOR THE THOUSANDS OF NEW BABY BOOMERS, YOU WILL SOON HEAR MORE ABOUT OUR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES ACTION AGENDA. THE PURPOSE IS TO LOOK AT CREATING ELDER-FRIENDLY INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITIES WITH CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, RECREATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL FACILITIES.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR HISTORY, AND IN THE FACE OF STIFF COMPETITION FROM OTHER PLACES, THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF EMPIRE STATE GAMES WILL BE HELD IN WESTCHESTER. IN 2007, WE WILL HOST THE LARGEST AMATEUR ATHLETIC CONTEST IN THE STATE AND NATION (OUTSIDE OF THE OLYMPICS). OVER 6,000 ATHLETES — ADULTS AND YOUNGSTERS — WILL PARTICIPATE IN 29 SPORTS ON FIELDS AND FACILITIES COUNTY-WIDE. THEY WILL SLEEP IN OUR COLLEGE DORMS, WHILE ANOTHER 15 TO 20 THOUSAND VISITORS WILL FILL UP MORE THAN HALF OUR HOTEL ROOMS FOR FOUR NIGHTS. BESIDES BEING A TOURISM BONANZA BRINGING IN AN ESTIMATED 15 MILLION DOLLARS, IT'S ALSO A SHOWCASE FOR OUR LOCAL COLLEGES TO ATTRACT POTENTIAL STUDENTS. I CONGRATULATE THE ENTIRE PARKS DEPARTMENT FOR PUTTING TOGETHER THIS WINNING APPLICATION.

SPEAKING OF TOURISM, THE LATEST DATA SHOWS NEARLY A 1 BILLION DOLLAR IMPACT ON THE WESTCHESTER ECONOMY. THIS INCLUDES ALL HOSPITALITY VENUES — FROM FAMILY OWNED RESTAURANTS WITH 10 TABLES TO THE LARGEST RESORT HOTELS. AND, WE WILL BE DOING MORE THIS YEAR TO CONTINUE TO INCREASE HOTEL TAX REVENUE WHICH WAS \$4.7 MILLION DOLLARS LAST YEAR.

LAST WEEK THE SCULPTURE FORUM ON THE COURTHOUSE PLAZA WAS UNVEILED. IT IS ONE OF THE LARGEST OUTDOOR PUBLIC SCULPTURE EXHIBITS IN NEW YORK, AND THE IDEA CAME FROM ONE MAN — NORMAN ADLER. HE IS HERE WITH HIS COLLEAGUES NORMA HILL AND GEORGE DRAPEAU. THANKS TO THEIR CONTACTS WITH THE SCULPTORS GUILD, WE CAN ALL ENJOY THESE BEAUTIFUL WORKS BY WORLD RENOWNED ARTISTS.

NEXT YEAR, THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF LEGISLATOR CLINTON YOUNG, ANOTHER STATUE WILL BE ADDED: A 12-FOOT HIGH BRONZE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. I CAN'T THINK OF A BETTER WAY TO RECOGNIZE THIS GREAT MAN THAN TO HAVE HIS LIKENESS IN FRONT OF OUR COURT SIGNIFYING JUSTICE AND TOLERANCE FOR ALL.

IN JUST A FEW MONTHS, IN TIME FOR THE SUMMER BASEBALL SEASON, THERE WILL BE A MIRACLE IN HARTSDALE — A MIRACLE FIELD, THAT IS. ONE OF MOST HEARTWARMING PROJECTS EVER UNDERTAKEN, IN A COUNTY OF HEARTWARMING PROJECTS, IT WILL BE A BALL FIELD AND A LEAGUE WHERE DISABLED KIDS CAN PLAY OUR NATIONAL PASTIME. AS PART OF MY LEGACY PROGRAM WHICH HAS CREATED SOCCER AND MULTI-PURPOSE FIELDS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY, THE RUBBERIZED MIRACLE FIELD WILL BE THE FIRST IN THE STATE AND LOCATED AT RIDGE ROAD PARK. I WANT TO THANK LEGISLATOR MARTY ROGOWSKY WHO BROUGHT THIS NON-PROFIT PROJECT TO MY ATTENTION.

I ALSO WANT TO GIVE OUR INNER CITY KIDS FROM LOW INCOME FAMILIES A SLEEP-AWAY CAMP EXPERIENCE. MANY SPEND HOT SUMMER DAYS WITH LITTLE TO DO. SOME GET INTO TROUBLE. I WANT THEM TO LEAVE THE CONCRETE AND LEARN TO SWIM, FISH, GO BOATING, SLEEP UNDER THE STARS AND WAKE UP WITH CRISP FRESH MOUNTAIN AIR.

THAT'S WHY BEGINNING NEXT SUMMER, WE WILL REOPEN A TWO WEEK CAMP AT MOUNTAIN LAKES FOR 300 KIDS. WE ARE GOING TO CALL IT CAMP MORTY, IN MEMORY OF MORT HYMAN, A LEGEND IN THE PARKS DEPARTMENT WHO WAS SUPERVISOR OF CAMPING FOR MANY YEARS. I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE MORTY'S WIFE, CAMILLE, HIS DAUGHTER CHARLENE AND HER HUSBAND KEN WHO ARE HERE TONIGHT. I ALSO WANT TO THANK LEGISLATOR VITO PINTO, THE BOARD'S REPRESENTATIVE ON OUR PARKS BOARD, FOR HIS UNWAVERING SUPPORT OF OUR PARKS SYSTEM.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOUTH AT RISK HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER. THE YOUTH BUREAU MANAGES OVER \$5 MILLION FOR 120 AGENCIES THAT SERVE ABOUT 20,000 YOUNG PEOPLE A YEAR, FROM BIRTH TO 21 YEARS. THIS YEAR THE FOCUS IS ON GANG PREVENTION COMMUNITY BY COMMUNITY—SCHOOL BY SCHOOL. SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS THAT ARE IN YONKERS AND MOUNT VERNON NOW WILL BE TAILORED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHER MUNICIPALITIES. AND, WE WILL GO AFTER MORE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR THIS PURPOSE.

WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED MUCH IN THIS COUNTY WITH THE AID OF FEDERAL FUNDS. THAT IS WHY I AM PARTICULARLY CONCERNED OVER HUD'S DECISION TO ONCE AGAIN REDUCE FUNDING TO OUR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM, ESPECIALLY WHEN THERE CONTINUES TO BE SUCH A NEED.

LAST WEEK I CUT THE RIBBON FOR A HOUSE IN CHAPPAQUA THAT HAD BEEN RENOVATED WITH CDBG FUNDS AND WILL NOW PROVIDE PERMANENT HOUSING FOR THREE FORMERLY HOMELESS DISABLED SENIORS. IF HUD'S PLAN IS IMPLEMENTED, PROJECTS LIKE THAT COULD BE CURTAILED. WE WOULD LOSE \$1.5 MILLION DOLLARS WHICH COULD LIMIT OUR ABILITY TO REHABILITATE ABOUT 100 SENIOR CITIZEN UNITS, OR CUT OUR EFFORTS TO PROVIDE CLEAN WATER, SAFE SIDEWALKS AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS. I HAVE FOUGHT THESE CUTBACKS FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS, AND, WITH THE POWER OF OUR CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION, WAS SUCCESSFUL. WE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER TO FIGHT THIS REDUCTION WHICH COULD ELIMINATE MANY OF OUR MUCH NEEDED PROGRAMS.

WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT, MANY DEPARTMENTS ARE INVOLVED. FOR YEARS, OUR PLANNING DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN THE PROTECTOR OF OUR GROUND AND DRINKING WATER. IT ALSO WATCHES OVER 300 ACRES OF FARMLAND, ESPECIALLY HILLTOP HANOVER FARM. PURCHASED LAST YEAR TO CREATE AN ORGANIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE CENTER, IT IS ALREADY THE LOCATION OF EDUCATIONAL AND AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS BY A VARIETY OF ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS.

NOW THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT IS FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE OF THE TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE, A DECISION THAT WILL AFFECT FOREVER THE PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE OF WESTCHESTER. WITH IT COMES AN UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY FOR A MASS TRANSIT COMPONENT. THAT'S WHY ROCKLAND COUNTY EXECUTIVE SCOTT VANDERHOEF AND I CREATED THE TAPPAN ZEE JOINT TASK FORCE. IT WILL KEEP PRESSURE ON THE STATE AGENCIES INVOLVED TO MAKE SURE THE PUBLIC IS AWARE OF THE VARIOUS ALTERNATIVES AND WHAT WOULD BE BEST FOR WESTCHESTER.

WHEN WE THINK OF PUBLIC WORKS, WE THINK OF ROADS, BRIDGES, AND COUNTY FACILITIES. NO ONE THINKS OF THE DEPARTMENT AS BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT. BUT THEY ARE. BUILDING ON PREVIOUS EFFORTS, THE DEPARTMENT IS NOW FOCUSING ON AIR CELL DEVICES AND SYNTHETIC OIL TO INCREASE GAS MILEAGE AND REDUCE WASTE OIL. OUR 78 HYBRID CARS, 25 % OF OUR FLEET, ENABLES AN ESTIMATED FUEL SAVINGS OF 15,000 GALLONS YEARLY, AND ALSO REDUCES EMISSIONS. OUR GASOLINE VEHICLES USE 10% ETHANOL AND OUR DIESEL VEHICLES AND GENERATORS USE ULTRA-LOW SULPHUR FUEL. WE ARE CURRENTLY TESTING “GREEN” CLEANING PRODUCTS TO REDUCE POLLUTANTS FURTHER.

THE SAME IS TRUE OF OUR DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION. YOU THINK OF BUSES AND PLANES. WE THINK OF MAKING EVERY AREA OF TRANSPORTATION MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE. OUR BEE-LINE BUSES USE LOW SULPHUR FUEL AND NEXT MONTH WE WILL TEST FOUR HYBRID DIESEL ELECTRIC BUSES.

WITH THE ISO 14001 CERTIFICATION AT THE AIRPORT, EVERY ACTION MUST HAVE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT. AND NOW, THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACILITIES IS WORKING TOWARDS THE SAME CERTIFICATION FOR THE YONKERS SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT.

OVER 50,000 RESIDENTS BOARD THE BEE-LINE EVERYDAY. 30% OF THEM CONNECT WITH A NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY OR BUS, AND IT IS MY GOAL TO BE PART OF THE METROCARD PROGRAM BY THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2007. THIS WILL BRING ADDITIONAL SAVINGS AND EXPANDED TRANSFER OPTIONS TO OUR RIDERS. ALSO ON THE DRAWING BOARD IS THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PETRILLO PLAZA, OUR BUS DEPOT IN MOUNT VERNON WHICH SERVES 5,000 PASSENGERS DAILY. SIMILAR TO WHAT WAS DONE AT THE WHITE PLAINS TRANS CENTER, WE WILL IMPROVE SIDEWALKS, SHELTERS, BENCHES, LIGHTING AND EVEN CREATE A LINEAR PARK IN THIS DENSELY POPULATED CITY.

OUR DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION HAS ALWAYS BEEN FRONT AND CENTER WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING THE PUBLIC. VIGILANT IN ITS EFFORTS AGAINST UNSCRUPULOUS HOME IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTORS, TAX PREPARERS, GAS GOUGERS AND PREDATORY LENDERS, THE DEPARTMENT WILL TAKE ON MORE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL WATCHDOG INITIATIVES THIS YEAR.

YOUR BOARD IS NOW CONSIDERING LEGISLATION TO PROTECT HOME OWNERS FROM OVERFLOW SPILLS WHEN THEY GET HEATING OIL DELIVERIES. APPROXIMATELY 700-800 OF THE OIL SPILLS REPORTED EACH YEAR CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO EITHER THE LACK OF AN OVERFILL PREVENTION DEVICE OR A BROKEN ONE. IN ADDITION TO SIGNIFICANT PROPERTY DAMAGE, THESE SPILLS CAN ALSO POSE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS. ONCE PURCHASED BY THE HOMEOWNER FOR A MODEST PRICE, THESE DEVICES WOULD HAVE TO BE INSTALLED FOR FREE BY THE OIL COMPANIES, UNDER THE MONITORING OF CONSUMER PROTECTION. I URGE YOU TO PASS THIS NEW LAW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

AS WE LOOK AHEAD, WESTCHESTER — THEY CALL US AN “OLD SUBURB” — IS VITAL AND STRONGER THAN EVER. UNEMPLOYMENT IS DOWN, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS UP. NOT ONLY ARE WE RETAINING JOBS, WE ARE CREATING THEM. NOT ONLY ARE WE FILLING OFFICE VACANCIES, WE ARE BUILDING NEW OFFICES. WE HAVE PLANS TO TURN A COUNTY PARKING LOT INTO SENIOR AFFORDABLE APARTMENTS. WE HAVE PRESSED OUR FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS TO GET MORE TAX DOLLARS INTO WESTCHESTER AND TO FIX THE ALTERNATIVE MINIMUM TAX THAT IS BLEEDING OUR MIDDLE CLASS.

AS EVERYONE KNOWS, INTERNATIONAL TRADE IS GROWING RAPIDLY, AND I INTEND TO CONTINUE TO HELP WESTCHESTER PARTICIPATE IN THIS GLOBAL MARKET. THE OVERSEAS TRIPS WE TAKE — AT NO COST TO OUR TAXPAYERS — NOT ONLY ASSIST OUR BUSINESSES, BUT ALSO INVITE EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES, WHICH ARE SO VITAL IN THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.

TONIGHT, WE HAVE AS OUR GUEST JEROME MA, VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS FOR LENOVO. I WANT TO THANK MR. MA FOR ENABLING US TO MEET WITH HIGH LEVEL CHINESE OFFICIALS IN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS ON OUR RECENT TRIP THERE.

THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE CHALLENGES, BUT WE WILL CONTINUE TO OVERCOME THEM. THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE PROBLEMS, BUT WITH PERSEVERANCE WE WILL SOLVE THEM.

OUR PROGRAMS ARE CREATED TO PROTECT AND SERVE EVERY PERSON IN WESTCHESTER WHO NEEDS IT. AND I AM PROUD OF THAT. BUT, I HOPE THE DAY WILL COME WHEN WE WON'T NEED SOME OF THEM. I HOPE THERE WON'T BE A NEED FOR A HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, OR A HOMELESS SHELTER. I HOPE WE WON'T NEED TO PUT KIDS IN DETENTION CENTERS OR HAVE SENIORS CHOOSE BETWEEN FOOD AND MEDICATIONS. BUT UNTIL THAT DAY COMES, THIS ADMINISTRATION IS HERE FOR EVERYONE.

WESTCHESTER IS SOLID, SAFE AND SECURE. WE HAVE ENERGY, COURAGE AND COMPASSION. OUR STRENGTH LIES IN OUR DIVERSITY, AND WE MUST CONTINUE TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO ENHANCE THE SAFEGUARDS WE HAVE PUT IN PLACE — SO THAT OUR RESIDENTS ARE PROTECTED, OUR BUSINESSES FLOURISH, AND THOSE WHO NEED OUR HELP THE MOST, FIND IT WITH TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING. SOME OF US MAY BE RICHER, SOME POORER. SOME MAY SPEAK WITH ACCENTS, OTHERS WITH FRAILTY. BUT WE ARE ALL THE FAMILY OF WESTCHESTER.

WE WILL SOON UNVEIL THE SEPTEMBER 11TH MEMORIAL IN KENSICO DAM PLAZA. A MONUMENT SO AWE-INSPIRING THAT PEOPLE FROM AROUND THIS NATION WILL MAKE A SPECIAL TRIP TO SEE IT. IT WAS CREATED OUT OF LOSS AND CONSTRUCTED OUT OF LOVE. IT WAS FUNDED BY THE PEOPLE OF THIS GREAT COUNTY AND IT WILL STAND FOREVER AS A TESTAMENT TO A COUNTY UNITED WITH UNDERSTANDING AND HOPE — A COUNTY I AM PROUD TO SERVE.

THANK YOU AND GOOD NIGHT.