

New Federal Funds Will Support Community and Schools Together Project to Prevent Violence and Gang Activity on Long Island



Huntington Station, NY— On Thursday, U.S. Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) and the Tri Community and Youth Agency announced \$94,000 in new federal funds to enhance the Community and Schools Together (CAST) Project. This is an intensive gang prevention program designed to help at-risk youth and their families make positive choices through education and empowerment. Congressman Israel, Huntington Town Supervisor Frank Petrone and Huntington Town Board Members met with students and their families at the Huntington Station facility as they explained how their CAST involvement changed their lives and Executive Director Debbie Rimler explained how these new funds will make it possible to keep this program running.

“We need to get gangs off of our streets and out of our schools,” said Congressman Israel, a Member of House Appropriations Committee. “The Community and Schools Together (CAST) approach to gang prevention engages at-risk youth and their families to steer them away from gang activity and provide clear alternatives to gang involvement. I’m proud to have secured these federal funds so that the Tri Community and Youth Agency has the resources it needs to stop local gang activity.”

“I am deeply appreciative to Congressman Steve Israel for his commitment to this important program, which resulted from the Gang Summit I sponsored in May 2001,” said Huntington Town Supervisor Frank Petrone. “Since its inception in 2005, C.A.S.T. has provided services to 300 students and 406 family members. This funding provides ongoing support of the goals and objectives that ensure our youth has the appropriate tools by which to make effective and positive choices.”

Early intervention is critical in preventing children from gang involvement. According to 2005 Suffolk County Police Department statistics, there were over 4,000 known gang members and associates in Suffolk County. The major gangs on Long Island – the Bloods, Crips, MS-13, Legion of Doom and Latin Kings – are constantly recruiting new members. At the Tri-Community and Youth Agency, the CAST project addresses at risk-youth and their families in grades 5-9 in the school districts of Huntington and South Huntington, Long Island.

Tri Community and Youth Agency is a private, not-for-profit agency serving youth and community members in Huntington, South Huntington and Cold Spring Harbor. The agency has been in operation for over 32 years and in that time has provided educational, recreational, cultural, advocacy and counseling programs to youth and their families.

Through the intervention of the CAST project, participants have increased school attendance, increased grades, decreased truancy and behavioral issues, decreased gang affiliation and juvenile justice involvement, and become involved in positive alternative activities. The advocates shadow youth in and out of school to conduct home visits and provide intensive case management.

The funding will be used by the Tri Community and Youth Agency to enhance the availability of the CAST program to students and families on Long Island. It was approved by the House on December 19, 2007 as part of the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008. This bill was signed into law by the President on December 26, 2007.