



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas P. Morahan

## Senator Morahan Announces Funding for Community Prosecution Initiative

THOMAS P. MORAHAN March 30, 2009



(Haverstraw, NY) -- Rockland County District Attorney Thomas Zugibe and New York State Senator Thomas Morahan joined other local lawmakers, law enforcement officials and school leaders to announce the launch of Community Prosecution in Rockland County. Community Prosecution is a proactive approach to helping communities solve local crime problems by developing seamless relationships between prosecutors, police departments and the neighborhoods they serve. District Attorney Zugibe said, "We will change the focus of prosecution from simply obtaining convictions to working with communities to solve

neighborhood problems throughout Rockland County. Community Prosecution will help ensure the criminal justice system is accountable and responsive to our residents by building strong connections between what happens in the courtroom and what is happening in local communities." The Community Prosecution initiative is funded by a \$100,000 Division of Criminal Justice Services grant, secured with the help of Rockland County State Senator Thomas Morahan. "I am pleased to have been able to secure funding for this innovative and grassroots approach to law enforcement. District Attorney Zugibe is taking a leadership role in building partnerships that will bring the police, the community, and other criminal justice and local agencies together to find ways to work together to prevent crime and improve neighborhood safety," said Senator Morahan. Community Prosecution targets serious crime, as well as those issues that typically have the greatest impact on the quality of life of our residents. By focusing on street-level drug dealing, property theft, prostitution, truancy, graffiti and other offenses, prosecutors working with police, schools and residents will develop strategies to eliminate the problems and build stronger neighborhoods. The Community Prosecution model is being launched in the Town of Haverstraw, where law enforcement officials, educators and community members have already begun working with the DA's office to identify several of their concerns. Supervisor Howard T. Phillips, Jr. said, "I want to commend District Attorney Zugibe for this innovative and progressive approach to law enforcement and prosecution. This is a cutting-edge initiative, and the results will be seen immediately." Community prosecutors engaging directly with Rockland County residents will support the work of local police and target crime at its core. This will allow Assistant District Attorneys to both prosecute their cases and help break the cycles of crime and violence. The community-based prosecutors will work with local officials and neighborhoods to identify and prosecute the worst offenders, as well as bring the resources of the district attorney's office to bear on low-level crimes. This comprehensive, problem-solving approach, combined with the relentless prosecution of the worst offenders will have a sustained impact on community safety. Haverstraw Police Chief Charles Miller said, "A

closer working relationship among prosecutors, police and the community will go a long way toward helping Rockland's neighborhoods become safer. I applaud and support District Attorney Zugibe's initiative." Community Prosecution strategies recently led to eight arrests on drugs and weapons charges on First Street in the Village of Haverstraw. Mayor Michael Kohut said, "A program such as this, that addresses the root causes of crime, not just offering a reactionary response, has to help everyone in the long run. Having a local ADA with a stake in the community will let them not just prosecute, but prevent crime." Village of West Haverstraw Mayor John Ramundo is another key player in District Attorney Zugibe's initiative. Ramundo said, "District Attorney Tom Zugibe has my full support in his efforts to build community-oriented partnerships as part of a strategy to reduce the number of arrests and prosecutions, for the purpose of improving public safety. I want to thank Senator Tom Morahan for his assistance in getting the Community Prosecution initiative funded." During his tenure as a judge in the Village of West Haverstraw, District Attorney Zugibe successfully applied basic Community Prosecution elements to several cases in the North Rockland Central School District. By partnering with school officials, then Judge Zugibe, linked the adjudication of juvenile offenses to improved school performance and conduct, seeking to divert youthful offenders from the criminal justice system. According to DA Zugibe, "Assistant District Attorneys who know the faces in their communities will work to make sure good kids don't become bad kids by falling into the criminal justice system."

Superintendent Brian Monahan said, "When young people get in trouble, it makes sense for the educational system and the court system to work together. Judge Zugibe's work helped our students and our school. I am glad to see his efforts being expanded." District Attorney Zugibe said this ambitious endeavor, the first county-wide Community Prosecution effort in the Hudson Valley, will ultimately expand to include Stony Point, Clarkstown, Ramapo and Orangetown. Prosecutors will be assigned to specific communities, where they will engage residents and listen to concerns about local issues. Community prosecutors enforce quality of life laws to improve overall safety in a community and to back up policing strategies that

emphasize zero tolerance for criminal offenses. By using this prosecutorial strategy throughout Rockland County, District Attorney Zugibe says his prosecutors will enforce low-level ordinance violations that might not have been prosecuted in the past. This makes the community more livable for residents, businesses, schools and places of worship, and sends the “not here” message to would-be criminals. Through Community Prosecution, Rockland County prosecutors will transcend their traditional roles as "case processors" and forge partnerships with the community to act as problem solvers, and work with law enforcement agencies to identify and prosecute those offenders most responsible for violence, crime and disorder in our communities. Law enforcement cannot be reactionary. Community Prosecution will prevent crime by addressing its underlying local causes in concert with local officials, police departments, schools and neighborhoods. The Community Prosecution model has been used to great effect in several U.S. cities including Portland, Oregon, Minneapolis, Minnesota and Brooklyn, New York.