**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**South Orange Teams with Seton Hall University and Essex County for New Community Care & Justice Program, Seeks Input**

**South Orange, NJ (March 5, 2021)** South Orange Village has announced the launch of the “Community Care & Justice” pilot program and encourages stakeholders to join on Sunday, March 7 at 7:00 p.m. for a town hall to solicit feedback.

Initiated by Village President Sheena Collum, the Community Care & Justice (CC&J) initiative is a collaboration between the South Orange community, Seton Hall University and Essex County. The initiative seeks to reimagine traditional models of law enforcement by putting a greater emphasis on wellness and crisis prevention while embedding care and compassion service values into all facets of police operational strategies and enhancing training for de-escalation and implicit bias.

The program will be led by Trustee Donna Coallier, chair of the Village’s Health and Public Safety Committee, and Dr. Juan Rios, Director of Seton Hall University’s Master of Social Work program.

“Each year, we have more than 350 service calls to the South Orange Police Department that include domestic violence, mental health crises, substance abuse, homelessness, and welfare checks,” said Coallier. “And let’s not minimize ‘suspicious person’ calls that disproportionately impact people of color who are our residents or guests. Tackling all these issues requires a community-centric approach and data to measure outcomes and progress.”

An important program goal for the CC&J initiative includes making best practices scalable to other communities, police departments, and health professionals.

“We need to think big,” said Dr. Rios, a licensed clinical social worker whose body of work encompasses subject matter expertise in policing, mental health, restorative practices and racial/social justice. “Taking our lessons learned and implementation models here in South Orange and scaling them to other communities can be a game-changer.”

The County of Essex will be the third member in the partnership, with Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo pledging support. “This is a step in the right direction and has endless possibilities to serve all communities in our County. I always say that our strength is our diversity, which includes being respectful of one another and understanding each other’s differences. Our Racism, Bias and Discrimination Committee, which participated in early discussions on framework, is eager to ignite this partnership.”

South Orange is a diverse community of 17,000 (more than 35 percent of its residents are people of color), which abuts County neighbors Maplewood, Newark, East Orange, West Orange and Orange and houses within its borders Seton Hall University, which itself is home to more than 10,000 students, with a diversity rate of 46 percent.

Focused on establishing the groundwork to move forward as a model of care and compassion-based public safety and wellness, the program is designed to rally the community around its values and engage public servants, activists, youth, faith-based leaders, first responders and other stakeholders in collaborating to identify and drive opportunities to improve local wellness and public safety outcomes.

“We’re glad to have the help,” said South Orange Chief of Police Kyle Kroll. “After the murder of George Floyd, I committed to our community that we in the police department would be listening and working every day to do better and involve those we serve in helping us become stronger – both as a police department and a community. We’ve started our way along that path with the Community Police Collaborative (CPC), which is focused on police-community outreach, law enforcement data and analytics, and training programs. We will liaise closely with both the CPC and the CC&J team as we look for opportunities to improve our service to the community. Together, we can do better, and the mandate is clear—we must.”

CPC Chair Bobby Brown amplified Chief Kroll's call for collaboration. “We’re delighted to see the CC&J program coming to fruition. We see it as playing an important role in improving municipal services here in South Orange, and so have tapped CPC members Brendan Gioello and Dr. Sara Wakefield to be liaisons to the program.”

The town hall collaboration event at 7p.m. on Sunday, March 7 will serve to introduce the Community Care & Justice program and to gather input from community members.

Meeting capacity is limited. **To register, please visit:** [**https://bit.ly/3qiptES**](https://bit.ly/3qiptES)**.** A video recording will be made available to the public.

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