



# BCPO News

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## Attorney General Porrino, Prosecutor Coffina visit Willingboro High School to Discuss SAFE STOP Program with Student Drivers

**WILLINGBORO** – Students at Willingboro High School took a break from their regular lesson plan today to learn about a statewide campaign that encourages safe traffic stops as a way to build trust between police and the communities they serve.

Details about the initiative, known as SAFE STOP, were presented to approximately 30 students with driver's licenses by Attorney General Christopher S. Porrino and Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina.

General Porrino launched the educational campaign in November as a way to reduce tensions during traffic stops by teaching motorists how to conduct themselves safely after being pulled over by a police officer. Using short videos from such celebrities as Shaquille O'Neal and former N.Y. Giant Jessie Armstead, as well as police officers and clergy members from across the state, SAFE STOP emphasizes behavior that shows police the motorist is not a threat to the police officer and is willing to be cooperative during the traffic stop.

Among other actions, drivers are encouraged to pull over in a safe location as soon as possible, keep their hands on the steering wheel and calmly comply with the officer's instructions. This includes providing identification and driving credentials, and stepping out of the vehicle if asked.

"SAFE STOP is not about politics and it's not about fixing blame. It's about avoiding conflict and saving lives by doing what we can to ensure that both police and the citizens they serve are as informed as possible about their rights and obligations. It's about building trust between police and the communities they serve," General Porrino said. "I want to thank Prosecutor Coffina for taking this important message to the students of Burlington County. It is critical that young people are informed particularly as they get behind the wheel for the first time."

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The campaign also attempts to dispel misconceptions about expected behavior by motorists after being pulled over. For example, some drivers may believe that immediately reaching towards the glove box or another compartment to retrieve their motor vehicle registration and insurance card is the preferred way to proceed. In fact, such quick movements – especially in the dark – will create concern on the part of the approaching officer. It is preferable for motorists to put on their dome light, lower their window, place their hands on the steering wheel and request permission to retrieve the documents.

According to General Porrino, SAFE STOP evolved against a backdrop of national tension over a series of police-involved shooting incidents in which routine traffic stops turned deadly, and the subsequent ambush killings of multiple police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge only days apart in July 2016.

“Attorney General Porrino has done a tremendous service to the people of New Jersey by introducing the SAFE STOP initiative. We may never know how many lives will be saved as a result of this educational campaign, but with each person it reaches, the potential for conflict and violence is reduced,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “Once the officer and the driver understand that neither intends to harm the other, the traffic stop can proceed with the likelihood that all parties will get home safely.”

SAFE STOP also informs motorists of their rights during a traffic stop, and how to file a complaint against the officer if they feel they were mistreated. The Willingboro High School students who took the SAFE STOP pledge were given decals to place on their vehicles that alert officers they are familiar with the program.

“This was very powerful,” Willingboro High School Principal Kimberly Ash said after viewing the presentation. “We will infuse SAFE STOP into our driver’s education curriculum immediately.”

SAFE STOP is the latest of several actions taken by the Attorney General and law enforcement throughout New Jersey to improve the relationship between police and their communities.

Other measures have included:

- Establishing grant opportunities for law enforcement agencies to encourage community policing programs that bring officers together with children and teenagers outside of a police setting.
- Protocols to ensure conflict-free and transparent investigations of police-involved shootings and alleged police misconduct.
- Protocols for body worn cameras by police, and funding to encourage their widespread use by law enforcement agencies.
- Mandated annual training for all sworn law enforcement members in the areas of implicit bias, de-escalation techniques and cultural awareness.

To learn more about the SAFE STOP program, go to <http://www.nj.gov/oag/safestopnj/>

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