

# Prosecutor launches Safe Place program to battle bias

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Is someone painting graffiti on a Chinese restaurant telling the owners to go home and blaming them for COVID a bias incident or a bias crime?

During a presentation from the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office on Feb. 8 at the Middle Township Performing Arts Center, Capt. Joseph Landis said defacing the restaurant amounts to a bias crime, criminal mischief and harassment.

He said bias and hate crimes are taking place nationwide and all should be reported to police. Many bias incidents are not reported because someone believes "it is stupid and you're bothering the police," Landis said.

Detective Mary Rybicki asked if someone painting swastikas on a tree with the words "kill them all" is a bias incident or a bias crime. She said it was a bias incident that should be



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Capt. Joe Landis of the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office speaks during a Stop the Hate forum Feb. 8 in the Middle Township Performing Arts Center.

reported to police. Rybicki visit area schools, spreading an anti-bias message. Landis said a third-de-

gree crime can become a second-degree crime with a more severe sentence when bias is involved. Anti-gay slurs with pro-

fanity painted on an LG-BTQ+ clubhouse is a bias crime because it targets someone connected with the building, he said.

Landis said youth need to be listened to and taught not to be a product of their environment, "but a product of their decisions." He said he grew up surrounded by racism but such cycles can be broken.

"Every one of you in here has an ideology about something and I'll never change it, but I can change the way children see things, hear things and understand things and then let them make the choice of where they want to take it," Landis said.

The Prosecutor's Office is beginning a Safe Place initiative that was created by the Seattle Police Department. Any public building or business, such as a store or library, can sign up to put a decal in their window stating it's a safe place, a place to go if an individual is being targeted, followed or harassed.

"When any community member feels like they are

being targeted by an individual or group for a bias crime or incident and they feel threatened, they can go to any building and feel free that they can walk in knowing they will not be judged for what they look like, how they sound, what they stand for and that business or place will allow them to stay there safe, they'll call 911, until police can get there," Landis said.

The Safe Place initiative began in 2015 for the LG-BTQ community but now is inclusive to all classes of bias incidents and crime.

Landis said the safe program is only for private

and public entities and not for individual homes. The decals are free and available from the Prosecutor's Office.

Those who participate are asked to place the decal on their win-dow, call 911 when needed and allow a person or persons to re-main until police arrive. Staff should be trained in the Safe Place procedure, he said.

All police officers in the county will be aware of the Safe Place program, he said.

Contact the county Prosecutor's Office to participate at safe-place@cmcpros.net or (609) 465-1135.

## Lower Phila. woman charged in LCMRHS hoax

Continued from Page A1

rize a juvenile to perform.

• When the juvenile is engaged in an errand or errands involving a medical emergency or emergencies.

• When the juvenile is in attendance at an extracurricular school activity, activity sponsored by a religious or community-based organization, or other cultural, educational or social event sponsored by religious or community-based organizations.

The ordinance states that it is the responsibility of parents/guardians to make sure juveniles in their care follow the curfew. It is unlawful for any parent or guardian to allow an unaccompanied juvenile to be on any public street or in any public place between the hours mandated unless the circumstance meets the exceptions.

The first violation of this ordinance is a curbside warning to the juvenile. Subsequent violations within a year will lead to a written warning against both the juvenile and the parents/guardians. A third violation within a year will lead to an ordinance violation. Any person convicted of the violation shall be subject to up to 180 days community service or a fine of not more than \$1,000 or both. If both the juvenile and the juvenile's parents and guardians are both convicted of this violation, they will perform the community service together.

ERMA — A Philadelphia woman was charged with creating a false public alarm in association with the unfounded report of an active shooter Jan. 23 at the Lower Cape May Regional High School.

A multiagency response was initiated. Active-shooter protocols were swiftly activated by the school, law enforcement officers,

as well as additional first responders. Ultimately the report was determined to be false.

A thorough investigation was conducted by the Lower Township Police Department, which identified the caller as a 29-year-old woman.

Coordination was made with the Cape May County Prosecutor's Officer,

which recommended she be charged with the third-degree crime. The subject is now pending further adjudication.

### TIDES: Feb. 15-22, 2023

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
15	2:53	3:18	9:18	9:08
16	4:03	4:32	10:25	10:16
17	5:07	5:36	11:25	11:20
18	6:05	6:33		12:20
19	6:59	7:26	12:18	1:10
20	7:47	8:16	1:13	1:58
21	8:38	9:04	2:07	2:44
22	9:25	9:52	2:59	3:30

### MOON PHASES

New moon, Feb. 20 • first quarter, Feb. 27

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