

*Building a solid bridge
of understanding...*



**Community & Law Enforcement
Cooperative-Education Unit**



**NJ OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
COMMUNITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL UNIT
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What Is the Community and Law Enforcement Cooperative-education Unit?

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the Office of the Attorney General became concerned about the physical safety of those who are perceived to be of Mid-Eastern origin and other vulnerable minorities. New Jersey is the most diverse state in the union and the Attorney General's Office has long been working with various communities within the State to combat bias crimes, as well as, providing education and assistance to the law enforcement community on cross-cultural understanding. Unfortunately, some communities continued to have little contact with law enforcement which may have been a contributing factor in the growth of distrust of law enforcement in those communities. Additionally, the law enforcement community was not familiar with the cultural and religious observances of some of these communities. The Attorney General's Office recognized the need for new approaches to reach these under-served minority communities. The Community and Law Enforcement Cooperative Education Unit ("CLECE") was created as one means of response to this need. CLECE is charged to create better understanding between the law enforcement community and the diverse religious, ethnic and racial communities in New Jersey. It has the task of building a bridge of trust.

Know Your Rights and Duties

CLECE has pioneered a program to foster cross-cultural understanding and provide community education. A law enforcement panel may include:

- Office of Bias Crimes and Community Relations
- Division of State Police
- Division on Civil Rights
- Division of Consumer Affairs
- U.S. Department of Justice, Community Relations Service
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- U.S. Attorney's Office



County and local officials as well as representatives from the Governor's Office have also accompanied the panel in appropriate circumstances. The panel is a unique means for bringing community members together with law enforcement members to foster improved relations and understanding.

The format which is usually followed allows each agency representative the opportunity to explain agency functions and what each agency may have to offer to the community. After introductions, a question and answer period follows, where con-



cerns raised by community members in attendance are addressed at length. After attending a panel, one member of the Islamic Center of Delran stated, "I was relieved to know that I can take my frustration to an agency and there are real people who can help me." Community members who may have had a bad experience with law enforcement in their respective countries of origin are generally relieved to know that there are laws to protect them regardless of their status or background.

Creating a Liaison to Local, County, State and Federal Law Enforcement Agencies

CLECE also functions as a liaison between communities and law enforcement. With one phone call the CLECE representative will provide the caller with information about agencies which are available to provide information and assistance. CLECE will even make the initial contact to assure that the caller's issue reaches the right agency.



Taking the Time to Learn about Different Cultures

CLECE arranges for cross-cultural education sessions for law enforcement members. Representatives of various communities are recruited and encouraged to meet with law enforcement members so that they may learn about the cultures and values of diverse communities. Improved understanding between these parties is intended to foster sensitivity and mutual respect. For example, one Hindu community member reported, "I was surprised when a police officer took off his shoes in my house."

Creating Dialogue Between Communities in New Jersey

CLECE is also available to provide assistance where members of different communities may clash, resulting in a deterioration of relations between the communities. Because many clashes occur because of poor communication or misunderstanding, CLECE will attempt to formulate strategies for consideration of the communities to assist them in finding a mutually acceptable resolution.

Teaching Youth How to Resolve Their Issues

CLECE may also provide assistance to reduce tensions arising out of feuds or clashes between communities originating in home countries, especially where young people are at risk. CLECE has brought the communities together through interfaith and inter-cultural programs to address such tension. CLECE has participated in many youth programs and facilitated dialogue between adults and youth in order to promote understanding.

Recruiting for Careers in Law Enforcement

CLECE also assists law enforcement agencies in their attempts to diversify their employee ranks. CLECE participates in career days at community and cultural centers to provide information to community members who may have an interest in pursuing a law enforcement career.

In summary, CLECE's mission is to foster and promote a solid bridge of understanding between New Jersey's diverse communities and New Jersey's law enforcement community built upon mutual trust, respect and knowledge.