



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Justice Center Pioneers Forensic Interview Training Model *Course Focuses on Vulnerable Populations*

The Justice Center's Office of the Special Prosecutor/Inspector General (SPIG) recently conducted a session of its interactive *Forensic Interviewing Best Practices for Vulnerable Populations* training at its training center in Schenectady. Over the past year, four pilot courses were delivered to investigators, prosecutors and law enforcement from around the state. The intensive three and one-half day course provides information about the developmental and emotional needs of people who have disabilities or special needs which make them particularly vulnerable and teaches skills for interviewing individuals who become victims or witnesses.

The training program is part of the SPIG's ongoing effort to change the way the criminal justice system responds to allegations of abuse and neglect involving vulnerable victims to ensure these individuals have the same protections as the general population.

"This training provides investigators and prosecutors with the knowledge to build upon their skills to conduct interviews of vulnerable persons in a developmentally-appropriate manner," said Special Prosecutor/Inspector General Patricia E. Gunning. "Our emphasis is on reducing the risk of re-traumatization while making sure the information gathered is credible and reliable."

In late March, 27 investigators and prosecutors, including members of the Schenectady Police Department and the New York State Police received training. Two dozen members of law enforcement attended the course which was held January of 2016 in Queens. Participants included investigators with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and prosecutors from the metro region. At the inaugural sessions of the training conducted in October and November of 2015, more than 50 investigators and prosecutors completed the course.

The Justice Center hopes to make this innovative curriculum a mainstay in the training of best practices for anyone and everyone involved in the investigation of cases involving vulnerable persons. Plans are underway for the course to be offered again this Fall.

The training was developed by Justice Center prosecutors, in collaboration with state and nationally recognized experts. It features lectures and demonstrations conducted by Dr. Scott Modell who is widely known for his work in the area of disability abuse and interview techniques

for individuals with developmental disabilities and Dr. Eileen Treacy, an expert in child sexual abuse who is perhaps the state's best known instructor on forensic interviewing.

The training includes role-play where participants interview trained Justice Center staff who portray individuals with diverse backgrounds and diagnoses based on real cases. The exercises are critiqued by prosecutors, law enforcement officers and others with multiple years of experience in forensic interviewing.

Since the establishment of the Justice Center in June of 2013, cases involving the abuse of vulnerable persons that might have gone unreported in the past are now reported to and investigated by the Justice Center and local law enforcement agencies. The Justice Center makes this training available to all New York State law enforcement agencies and District Attorney's Offices on a limited basis throughout the year. For more information about the Justice Center's *Forensic Interviewing Best Practices for Vulnerable Populations* training, please contact the Office of the Special Prosecutor/Inspector General at ic.sm.SPIG@justicecenter.ny.gov.

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