

Staten Island Advance



\$1.50 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2017

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CAMPUS SCOURGE

Town and gown tag-team rapists

'Staten Island Plan' weds D.A.'s resources to colleges' policing of sexual assaults

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District Attorney Michael E. McMahon's office and the borough's three colleges are kicking off the 2017-18 school year with an initiative to combat sexual assault on campus and aid the survivors of such crimes.

The Staten Island Comprehensive College Sexual Assault Initiative, or the Staten Island Plan, makes the district attorney's investigative resources and survivor support services available to students at St. John's University, Wagner College and the College of Staten Island (CSI).

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SUPPORT

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"As students begin a new semester, we want everyone on campus to feel safe and protected," McMahon said.

"Together, we will help survivors of sexual assault to explore a variety of options available to them, including counseling, medical resources, discussion of legal options, and providing them with a dedicated support person so guide them through the criminal justice system should the survivor wish to report the incident. This allows survivors to get a comprehensive idea of all their options before needing to make a decision on how they wish to continue."

William J. Fritz, president of the College of Staten Island, said, "[The] Staten Island Plan will greatly enhance CSI's efforts in providing the most effective help and support to students who are survivors of sexual assault," adding that this issue is of the "highest priority."

According to a 2014 Department of Justice study, only 20 percent of

sexual assaults on college campuses are reported to law enforcement officials.

Title IX, a civil rights law resulting from the Education Amendments of 1972, gave colleges and universities complete power to handle incidents of sexual assault and rape on college campuses without the assistance of law enforcement.

Each campus is supposed to have its own tribunal for investigating claims of sexual assault and rape.

Police are notified only when and if the victim chooses to report the crime a second time.

Through the initiative, assistant district attorneys from the D.A.'s Special Victims bureau will help the survivors navigate their options — inside and outside the criminal justice system — should they make the decision to report the incident.

"Wagner reiterates its commitment to stopping sexual assault and creating a climate where survivors can report without fear of retribution," said Wagner College president Richard Guarasci.

St. John's Vice Provost James O'Keefe said, "A peaceful and safe learning environment is absolutely

essential to higher education. This professional partnership will add a new dimension of expertise to our orientations, training and protocols in this imperative issue."

Assistant district attorneys will be present at all orientation sessions at the three campuses, will attend events throughout the year and host relevant trainings for student groups and staff.

There were four reported rapes on Wagner's Grymes Hill campus in 2015 and four in 2014.

At CSI's Willowbrook campus, there have been seven reported incidents of sexual assault in the past 14 years, and 15 reported incidents of sexual assault on Wagner's campus, including the eight reported rapes.

There were no reports of incidents at St. John's.

There were five additional incidents of dating violence and five incidents of stalking, considered a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) crime, at CSI in 2014.

None of the crimes were reported to law enforcement.

The Advance obtained the data from a report by the Office of Postsecondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education.