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GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES NYS PARTNERSHIP WITH GUARDIAN ANGELS TO PROMOTE ONLINE SAFETY

Angels to Provide Safety Education Programs to NY Schools, Communities

Governor George E. Pataki today announced that the New York State Office of Cyber Security & Critical Infrastructure (CSCIC) will partner with The Alliance of Guardian Angels, Inc. to promote online safety in New York's classrooms and communities.

Forming a "Strike Force on Cyber Safety," CSCIC will combine its technical expertise with The Guardian Angels' decades of experience to empower youth and communities to stay safe and resist criminal influences online. With a \$200,000 grant from CSCIC, The Guardian Angels will bring practical safety lessons to New York schools and communities through school-based workshops, online support and community outreach programs.

"Over the last twelve years, we have made tremendous strides in protecting young people from dangerous sexual predators," Governor Pataki said. "This historic new partnership will build on what we've been able to accomplish by providing yet another critical resource in our comprehensive effort to educate kids about potential dangers and help keep them safe."

"The Internet has had a tremendous impact on American society, culture and education in the past decade. For students and educators, the Internet has become a priceless tool for research, communications, and personal and professional development," said William F. Pelgrin, Director of CSCIC. "Yet the Internet also poses dangers, particularly for children. The Strike Force on Cyber Safety will help New Yorkers protect their children and communities against Internet dangers while still taking advantage of the many benefits the Internet offers."

CSCIC is responsible for leading and coordinating New York State's efforts regarding cyber readiness, geographic information systems (GIS) and critical infrastructure preparedness. CSCIC works collaboratively with the public and private sectors to foster communication and coordination.

Curtis Sliwa, Founder & Leader of The Guardian Angels, said, “When the Guardian Angels was founded in 1979, the safety risks facing New Yorkers were on the streets and in the subways. Yet today our children face even greater threats in the online world from pedophiles and cyber-bullies. In fact, adults are not immune either as citizens report hundreds of thousands of online fraud and identity theft complaints each year. The Strike Force on Cyber Safety will help communities resist these modern dangers and take control of their own online safety.”

Despite the risks posed by the Internet, parents often do not know how to monitor their children’s online activities. In addition, older children often understand the Internet better than their parents or their teachers, and can “outsmart” most filtering software and parental controls. The Strike Force on Cyber Safety will work with community groups to teach young people why it is important to operate safely in cyberspace, and will partner with parents to help them monitor their children’s online activity while maintaining a constructive dialogue with their children about online safety. The Strike Force on Cyber Safety will also provide instruction on acting safely and appropriately online in the academic setting. Children will learn how to discern between trusted academic sources and material of questionable integrity. And teachers will learn how to help ensure that students’ work has not been improperly created or plagiarized, while also identifying and preventing cyber-bullying, which plagues many schools.

The Strike Force will call on the expertise of The Guardian Angels’ CyberAngels program. Launched in 1995 in response to citizens’ calls for assistance in dealing with online stalking threats, today CyberAngels is one of the oldest and most respected online safety education programs in the country. Since 2003, CyberAngels has worked directly with schools and libraries, bringing workshops, seminars and lesson plans to educators around the country.

The organization possesses a unique ability to make an impact with students, teachers and parents. Members hail from diverse professional backgrounds – education, law enforcement, information technology, and law – reflecting the new challenges that face our communities. At the same time, The Guardian Angels still carry the credibility that is so essential to earning the respect of young people participating in their educational programs.

Mary Sliwa, Guardian Angels Executive Director, said “We are thrilled to partner with the State of New York to bring cyber safety programs to schools and communities. New York and CSCIC have taken a leadership approach to this issue, and together we will help to keep New Yorkers safe online.”

The NYS Office of Cyber Security and Critical Infrastructure Coordination (CSCIC), led by William F. Pelgrin, was established in September 2002 by Governor Pataki to address New York State’s cyber security readiness and critical infrastructure coordination. In focusing on the State’s cyber readiness and critical infrastructure coordination needs, it is important to address issues from both a cyber and physical perspective.

Being cognizant of the interdependencies between cyber and physical events is crucial. The efforts to address cyber events must include an awareness of the potential physical impacts; similarly, addressing physical events requires an awareness of the potential cyber impacts. To that end, CSCIC Director Pelgrin coordinates closely with James K. Kallstrom, Senior Advisor to the Governor for Counter Terrorism, and James McMahon, Director of the NYS Office of Homeland Security (OHS). This close partnership ensures that the information sharing and communication required to secure New York State's assets are maximized. The efforts of CSCIC build on the foundation already established in New York State to help the State protect, detect, respond to and recover from cyber-based incidents that threaten our State's critical public and private assets.

Started in 1979 when founder Curtis Sliwa and a dozen other "angels" began patrolling the New York City subways, the Guardian Angels and their trademark red berets have evolved into an international volunteer organization respected by law enforcement, welcomed by citizens and applauded by government. For more than 25 years, The Alliance of Guardian Angels, Inc., a 501(c)(3) community-based organization, has been dedicated to making New York a safer place to live, developing positive role models through community-based safety patrols and educational programs.

In 1995, Curtis Sliwa established the CyberAngels program of The Guardian Angels after he began receiving email messages from people desperate for assistance in dealing with online harassment, digital stalking, hate mail, and pedophiles lurking in chat rooms. The Guardian Angels applied the methods they pioneered to patrol the New York City streets and used them to fight crime on the Internet. Today, CyberAngels is one of the oldest and most respected online safety education programs in the world. CyberAngels has been recognized by President Bill Clinton with a Presidential Service Award, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and a host of other government officials and dignitaries.