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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Aug. 22, 2016

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Mayor Fulop announces Jersey City to become Second City in New Jersey to Launch Youth Court Program

Goal of the Program is to Reduce Youth Incarceration through Peer Involvement

JERSEY CITY – Mayor Steven M. Fulop today announced the launch of the **Jersey City Youth Court (JCYC) program**, an innovative peer-based model that will train youth to hear low-level, real-life cases involving their peers to prevent future involvement in the criminal justice system.

Jersey City becomes the second city in the state to launch a youth court program and joins more than 1,150 youth courts operating in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

Like other youth courts nationally, the goal of Jersey City's youth court program is to use positive peer mentoring to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses learn accountability and repair the harm caused by their actions. The program will provide afterschool employment opportunities and training for youth to serve as jurors, judges and advocates.

“In cities across the nation, youth courts are making important strides in lowering juvenile delinquency rates and diverting young people from entering the justice system,” said **Mayor Fulop**. “We are thrilled to introduce the Youth Court program to Jersey City, which will serve hundreds of youth from across the city and help put them on a positive path to success.”

Through the program, the court plans to recruit approximately 40 Jersey City youth, ages 13-17 who will be trained to serve as actual members of the court (advocates, judge, juror). In its first year, they will likely handle approximately 50 cases. Recruitment for the Jersey City Youth Court program will begin in the fall at local schools and community centers. The city is currently working with the Prosecutor's Office, the Municipal Court, the Police Department and the Board of Education to determine the type of matters that will be heard.

The program kicks off on **Tuesday, August 30 2016** at the city's first-ever **Youth Justice conference**, which will introduce participants to concepts of the new program as well as provide a forum to discuss criminal justice issues that uniquely affect youth in the City.

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The conference is being held in partnership with the **Department of Criminal Justice and the Guarini Institute for Government and Leadership at Saint Peter's University** and will feature a dynamic keynote speaker, various workshops and an interactive theater-based scenario on the principles of anti-violence.

During the conference, attendees will participate in a series of workshops on topics related to cyber-bullying, restorative justice, trauma and understanding the impact of one's behavior.

“Saint Peter's University and its Criminal Justice Department are honored to be part of the Jersey City Youth Court Program and we are pleased that students from the department's Internship Program will serve as assistants and mentors to Court participants,” said **Kevin G. Callahan, JD. JSC. (Ret) Assistant Professor, Department of Criminal Justice, Saint Peters University**. “Saint Peter's has always been committed to servicing our community and our Youth. I state without reservation, based on my long previous experience as a Criminal Court Judge, that this vital and needed program can potentially divert a youth from an unfortunate negative involvement in the system to a positive experience that can help that young person's future and our community as well.”

Since taking office, the Fulop administration has made youth development a top priority. In 2014, the city introduced the **Jersey City Summer Works Program**, a multi-program initiative, which has engaged over 2500 youth in employment and enrichment opportunities since its inception. Additionally, in February 2016, through the generous support of the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, the city formed the **Jersey City Youth Council**, which is co-chaired by Paul Boxer, Associate Professor of Psychology, Rutgers- Newark and Vivian Brady Phillips, Deputy Mayor of Jersey City. Comprised of members from local community-based organizations and city agencies, the goals of the Council are to reduce and prevent delinquency, while also promoting positive youth development opportunities for youth in Jersey City.

“By working with the community and engaging our youth in real life situations, they can learn and understand the impact that crime has on their community, their peers and themselves,” said **Public Safety Director James Shea**. “We view this as both a deterrent tool and the foundation for creating stronger and safer communities.”

Engaging community partners in the design of the Youth Court program is a critical component of the initiative. To date, the city has partnered with members of the Municipal Court, the Office of the Hudson County Prosecutor, the Jersey City Public Schools, the Jersey City Police Department, the Hudson County Superior Court and Saint Peter's University Criminal Justice Department and a variety of community-based organizations.

“Creating a path to reform versus incarceration for our children is a positive goal and the Youth Court sounds like an exciting and promising initiative in Jersey City,” said **Pamela Johnson, Executive Director of the Jersey City Anti-Violence Coalition**. “I am eager to learn more about the structure of the court and the opportunities for our youth to benefit from it during the upcoming Justice Conference.”

More information on the upcoming conference can be found on the city's youth development page at: www.jerseycitysummerworks.org

All media inquiries should be directed to Jennifer Morrill, Press Secretary to Mayor Steven M. Fulop at [201-547- 4836](tel:201-547-4836) or [201-376-0699](tel:201-376-0699)