



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



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JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSIONER TO CHALLENGE AUGUSTA TEENS AT RICHMOND COUNTY "KNOW THE LAW" FORUM

(AUGUSTA - GA) Georgia Juvenile Justice Commissioner Avery D. Niles and a panel of local Richmond County law enforcement professionals will field questions and offer expert advice on legal topics ranging from felonies and fake I-D's -- to juvenile rights and young people-at-risk for an upcoming teen legal forum and town hall meeting here.

Commissioner Niles began promoting this series of public meetings earlier this summer with his visits to Gainesville, Lula and Albany to encourage teen legal awareness. The Commissioner's teen forums are designed to challenge students statewide, starting with a single thought-provoking question: **"Do You Know the Law?"**

"Educating our young people about how the law applies to *them* and intervening with the right answers can reduce the chances of many of our youth becoming juvenile offenders," said Commissioner Niles.

"That's why we plan these town hall meetings about the importance of hanging-out with the right friends, about acting correctly in the presence of law enforcement, about making responsible choices every day, and about anticipating the kind of consequences to expect from reckless teen actions," Commissioner Niles said.

The next special panel that meets October 14th at the Augusta – Richmond County Library will also update local community and government leaders about the significant restructuring of Georgia's juvenile justice system beginning this January and how it will impact those already involved in the system.

"These reforms will be very productive for our communities," Commissioner Niles has told local town hall audiences. "The new law will reshape the way DJJ monitors itself and will revise the rules about incarcerating juvenile offenders. It places new focus on mental health and substance abuse treatment and on community based programs. It encourages us to continue to partner with our communities," the Commissioner said.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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But the Commissioner's forums primarily focus on educating teen audiences about the law through candid conversations with local police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and judges. The professionals on these panels emphasize what teens need to know *now* to keep them away from trouble, and out of Georgia's juvenile justice system.

"Our goal is to draw out any young people at-risk, get them involved, discuss these issues and get them informed," said Niles. "These face-to-face forums are a proven format for reaching out to those at-risk youth in our communities. It's so much simpler to have these conversations with our young people now, *before* the criminal life can find them."

At previous forums community leadership panels have answered questions ranging from teen sex and the law, to misdemeanors and military service. Police and prosecutors have covered topics including marijuana and misconduct on campus.

The Department of Juvenile Justice maintains 28 juvenile detention centers in Georgia. Commissioner Niles has set a personal goal to conduct a teen forum in each of those host communities where DJJ runs a secure facility.

"Whether our next forum brings standing room-only crowds, or if we only reach one or two young people at a time, it's time well spent if we can help keep the population down in Georgia's juvenile justice system," Commissioner Niles said. "We want to remind our youth that even as teens, their lives can either travel toward meaningful futures or they can encounter dream-shattering consequences, depending on their choices."

Commissioner Niles will be joined at the town hall meeting by the following Augusta-Richmond County community leaders who are scheduled to attend at this time: State Sen. Hardie Davis, Richmond County Sheriff Richard Roundtree, Juvenile Court Judge Douglas Flanagan, and Augusta Mayor Deke Copenhaver.

The Augusta Juvenile Justice Town Hall Meeting will be conducted Monday, October 14th, 2013 starting at 6:00pm at the Augusta-Richmond County Library at 823 Telfair St Augusta, GA. 30901. Concerned young participants are encouraged to attend.

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