

**For Immediate Release**  
December 10, 2021

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North Charleston High School

## Media Release

### **Law enforcement class increases interest in future policing careers**

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**North Charleston, SC** – Retired Mount Pleasant Police Officer Jay Tronco has been teaching law enforcement at North Charleston High School (NCHS) for the last four years. The program is the only one in the district and is part of the Career and Technology Education program offered by Charleston County School District (CCSD).

Tronco built the curriculum from scratch using state standards. The program has grown in popularity among the students, and Tronco noted that the students who enroll are either curious about the class or have a true interest in becoming a law enforcement officer.

The program includes three classes: Intro to Law Enforcement, Law Enforcement I, and Law Enforcement II. To be a completer, students have to successfully finish all three of the semester classes.

Every year, Tronco asks his first semester students their opinion about police officers. Their responses are usually negative. By then end of the course, many of those feelings have softened.

“As word got out about the class and what the students were learning, the beliefs about officers began to change,” said Tronco. “The students are learning about their individual rights and the numerous career options they may have should they pursue it.”

The curriculum includes Constitutional Law, search and seizure, traffic stops, a shooting simulator, handcuffing, baton use, CPR, and life-saving techniques. Tronco described it as very hands on.

“I get the kids engaged in the class from the very start,” said Tronco. “I let them put handcuffs on each other and on me. It’s true training.”

Tronco said that Principal Henry Darby has been a true cheerleader for the program. Darby was able to secure a police vehicle so that students could witness simulated traffic stops.

"The Constitution is something most people know very little about it," said Tronco. "That's the foundation of the class because as citizens we have so many rights and privileges. I show them what a legal search looks like and what an illegal search looks like. I teach them what cops can and can't do."

Tronco explained that he teaches his students that most police officers do the right thing but sometimes they do the wrong thing and don't realize it, or don't know any better.

"That's why it is important to me that they know their own rights," said Tronco. "If they run into a situation, they know they have the right to say no in certain situations."

This year, NCHS partnered with Charleston School of Law to bring law students in to teach "Street Law." The Street Law Clinic at Charleston School of Law is an experiential learning program in which law students receive training in law-related education, construct learner-centered lessons in law, designed to develop the critical thinking and cognitive skills of the high school students.

The Street Law Clinic focuses on developing an understanding of the law, the legal process, the United States system of government, and effective citizenship. The Clinic includes examining the role of law, courts, fairness, and equality in our state and in our country.

Emily Ledford, a third-year law student, said that during the semester, the law students were learning how to teach effectively and engage the high school students. They went into the classroom to put their lesson plans and knowledge into action on Fridays at NCHS.

"I applied to the Street Law Clinic because I always considered being a teacher," said Ledford. "Street Law satisfied my desire to be an attorney and to experience teaching in the classroom."

Ledford said that she was able to build encouraging relationships with the NCHS students in her class. She saw that some of them had a genuine interest in law.

"Most students didn't realize how much the law affects their every day lives," Ledford said. "For some of my students, their interaction with the law has not always been positive but the students learned that they have rights. My fellow law students' interactions with our students at NCHS created opportunities for really important in-depth conversations."

As part of the Street Law Clinic, after studying, discussing, and completing projects in criminal law, the students had to prepare for and conduct a mock trial. The students served as prosecutors, defense attorneys, witnesses, and jurors. Ledford said that the students seemed to enjoy the preparation and the actual trial. One student expressed her interest in attending law school and becoming an attorney.

"That was part of my goal in participating in Street Law," said Ledford. "If one student expressed an interest in law then I accomplished what I came to do. I wanted to show these students that there are so many opportunities in law enforcement and criminal justice."

Tronco was impressed with the students who sized on the opportunity to choose their role.

"Some of their choices were surprising and other chose a role perfectly suited for their personality," said Tronco. "It was encouraging to see the students take what they learned and apply it to the mock trial and their individual roles in the exercise."

Debra J. Gammons is the Street Law Clinic Professor. She has been teaching at Charleston School of Law since 2009. She has been practicing law since 1992.

"I love the law," said Gammons. "I love practicing law and teaching law."

Gammons teaches criminal law classes, constitutional law classes, freedom of speech – first amendment classes, sex, gender issues, and the law classes, and trial advocacy classes.

Gammons explained that a third-year law student, Viraj Patel, approached her about teaching Street Law as a means to fulfill the law school's mission of "Pro Bono Populi" – "For the good of the people." Patel agreed to help and Charleston School of Law implement the Street Law Clinic.

"Our high school students benefit from interacting with enthusiastic, intelligent, and motivated law students," said Gammons. "When they see these adults achieving their goals, the high school students believe that they can also set and achieve their own goals."

According to Gammons, Street Law is not about memorization; it is about critical thinking and problem-solving when considering legal issues, community issues, and how to create positive changes.

"These are questions presented to NCHS students in Street Law," Gammons said. "These students, under the leadership of my law students, engage in discussions and projects to build their critical thinking skills. They engaged in having a mock trial and they will engage in a Legacy Project focusing on their ancestors and themselves to build a brighter future for themselves."

The CSL Street Law Clinic was one of five law schools selected to participate in the International Street Law Collaboration Project. They will be working with the Street Law class at National Research Tomsk State University in Tomsk, Russia and their high school students to address social issues.

"I tell my law students and the high school students that we live in the best country in the world," said Gammons. "People risk their lives to be here. The majority of us had the privilege of being born here. We have the United States Constitution that forms a strong foundation for our freedoms. We also have responsibilities as citizens."

Gammons added that partnering with NCHS has given Charleston School of Law the opportunity to fulfill its mission and give law students a way to have a meaningful impact on young students' lives.

"In addition to their studying and reading law cases, they are interacting with real people, helping resolve real issues, and providing motivation for a bright future," Gammons said.

"I am looking forward to a continued and expanded partnership with the School of Law," said Tronco. "I can't thank the student teachers enough for taking the time to work with my students one-on-one and truly engage in each individual person."

### **Broadening student perspectives**

In Tronco's four years of teaching this class, he has seen the most hesitant students, with a dislike for police officer turn into the most successful students.

"They're not all going to be police officers or attorneys," said Tronco. "The ones who show an interest will have a direct path in front of them if they desire to take it.

"Many of these students deal with some very grown-up, serious issues at a very young age, and end up with ten lifetimes worth of law enforcement interaction by the time they get to me," said Tronco. "Many have committed crimes, been victims of crimes, and been a witness to a crime. "Hopefully this class helps mitigate preconceived notions and misconceptions about police officer and the law in general.

While local and state LE require you to be 21, there are a variety of programs that the age requirement is just 18. Charleston County Consolidated dispatch, and Transportation Security Administration are options as well as Explorer programs for those that wish to learn more about the ins and outs of law enforcement at a local level.

Tronco hopes the success of the class at NCHS will encourage other high schools to replicate the model.

"Mr. Tronco is a superlative instructor who has put NCHS upfront in the efforts to recruit students - soon to be adults - to be of top quality law enforcement officers," said Principal Henry Darby. "With his doing so, he is helping change the school and community culture for the better."

For more information contact Tronco at (843) 745-7140.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 49,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.