



PROBATION ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY

PASSAIC COUNTY PROBATION OFFICERS ACTIONS SAVES LIFE OF SUICIDAL CLIENT

Michael Greco, President, Local 116

What started out as a normal field day for two veteran Passaic County Probation Officers ultimately ended with their actions saving the life of a suicidal client. On February 8th, 2024, Senior Probation Officer Richard Conkling and Senior Probation Officer Kenneth Jennings were assigned to field duty conducting home visits. Upon the conclusion of a visit, SPO Conkling received a frantic phone call from one of his clients who was threatening to kill himself. The client was distraught and speaking in hysterics stating he was on the roof of a building and was going to jump. SPO Conkling remained calm and collected during the call despite all the chaos. When questioned as to his whereabouts, the client stated he was on the roof of his house. Having knowledge of the client's case, SPO Conkling knew he was currently residing at the YMCA in Paterson, NJ. Recognizing the severity of the situation and without hesitation, SPO Jennings called 911 and advised the Paterson Police Department of the developing situation. SPO Conkling stayed on the phone with his client and ensured he remained verbal and active during their conversation while SPO Jennings was providing real time updates to emergency services. Both officers, in the midst of navigating this life-threatening situation, began enroute to the client's location as emergency services had not yet arrived. SPO Conkling kept the client on the phone and engaged him for approximately 7 minutes before emergency responders arrived on scene and secured the client. Assistant Chief Gina Scappaticcio, who was apprised of the situation at this point and was present in the office on that day, immediately responded to the scene as the location was 2 blocks from the Passaic County Probation Office. Upon arrival, the scene was secured, and she was informed by incident command that the client had full intention of jumping off the building and the actions of SPO Conkling and SPO Jennings unquestionably saved his life.



SPO CONKLING



SPO JENNINGS

PO Conkling has a long-standing supervision relationship with the client that spans many years. Approximately 5 months prior, the client had another suicide attempt where he jumped off the roof of a home and suffered a broken leg. The client was in the process of rebuilding his life, had recently obtained housing at the YMCA and other areas of his life were promising. Unfortunately, he obtained new charges originating out of Bergen County and a Violation of Probation was filed against him. He explained to SPO Conkling that the turn of events in his life were too much to handle. SPO Conkling was well aware of the client's prior suicide attempt as well as the recent developments in his life and both he and SPO Jennings recognized the gravity of the moment. Both seasoned officers reacted without hesitation. Their actions not only saved the life of the client but have also affected the lives of his friends and family. Passaic County Assignment Judge Rudolph Filko commented "Their collective actions exemplify what it means to be a probation officer. The care and compassion for their client saved his life. We are all proud of their accomplishments." While TCA Melanie Nowling remarked "this one act will leave an emotional footprint for years to come, clearly demonstrating the value of our probation officers in the lives of our clients". Chief Dawn Moody added, "your quick thinking not only saved a life but also exemplified the true meaning of heroism. I am in awe of your selflessness and dedication to making the work we do impactful and meaningful". Indeed, the value of our work and the dedication required was on full display through the actions of both SPO Conkling and SPO Jennings. It is with great pride that I share this story with you to show the true impact of our work. The unmeasurable efforts that have life altering, and in this case, life saving results. I am honored to be associated with both heroic officers and I hope their example inspires you all to continue working for the public interest and strive for change in the lives of others.