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SMOC: Decision on Sahr Josiah regrettable

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GHS

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Along with the entire community, our thoughts and prayers are with Officer Phillip Hurton, his family and his fellow officers. Like every member of our community, South Middlesex Opportunity Council ("SMOC") was saddened and shocked by the senseless and tragic events of Tuesday, April 14.

As in so many parts of our country, we are witness to these random acts of violence that continue to occur - in our homes, our schools and on the streets of our cities and towns. The victims are sometimes children, the elderly and as in this case the protectors of our peace. The challenges we all face in dealing with this increase in violence are enormous.

Sahr Josiah, who has been arrested and charged with shooting Officer Hurton, resided in one of SMOC's programs. We find the crimes he is accused of committing reprehensible. We also recognize that this tragic event speaks to the challenges we face together as a community and a society.

Mr. Josiah was referred to SMOC's Transitional Youth Program by the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services ("DYS") in late October 2008, several days prior to his 21st birthday. This program provides shelter and support services to young adults who have aged out of the state DHS system and are at risk of homelessness. All referrals to the program are from state agencies. DHS requested expedited placement because Mr. Josiah would age out of their system within days and would otherwise be homeless. Due to the timeframe requested, SMOC asked DHS for information on his criminal background. DHS provided information confirming that Mr. Josiah had "no adult criminal record" and that he had posed no problems during his DHS custody. Based upon this information, we allowed Mr. Josiah to enter the program at 25 DeLoss Street. After Mr. Josiah entered the program, SMOC followed its protocol and conducted its own background check and found, contrary to DHS information, that he had a violent criminal background. SMOC staff members were faced with terminating an individual, at risk of homelessness, with a violent background, or keeping him in a stable housing situation with supportive services. Based upon his progress and program compliance and the risk he might pose to the community as a homeless individual without services, SMOC staff managers made the determination that he could remain in the program.

If DHS had provided SMOC with complete and accurate information regarding Mr. Josiah's criminal past, we would not have accepted him into our Transitional Youth Program. And in hindsight, SMOC's decision to allow him to remain in the program is deeply regrettable. SMOC is investigating the administrative protocol that resulted in the decision to allow Mr. Josiah to remain in the program. The findings from that investigation will determine our future course of action in regard to the Transitional Youth Program. In the meantime, we will accept no new referrals to the program. We have also assigned additional staff to work with the four remaining residents of 25 DeLoss Street.

Our dedicated staff is shaken to the core by this incident yet we are comforted by the news that Officer Hurton will recover and that no one else was injured. We pledge our full cooperation as the Framingham Police Department continues its criminal investigation. We also intend to meet with the Police Department to continue our joint efforts in dealing with these difficult community issues.

JAMES CUDDY, Executive Director

South Middlesex Opportunity Council,

Framingham

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