

# Effort to disrupt gangs

Talks focus on unaccompanied teens entering U.S.

BY ROBERT BRODSKY  
robert.brodsky@newsday.com

Violent street gangs including MS-13 are preying on vulnerable teens brought into the country as unaccompanied minors and placed with sometimes poorly vetted nonfamily guardians, Suffolk law enforcement officials said Monday during a meeting on immigration and safety issues.

The roundtable discussion at the Eastern Campus of Suffolk Community College in Riverhead focused on efforts by Suffolk law enforcement to combat the threat of MS-13 and disrupt their transnational network of drug and sex trafficking.

Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley), who hosted the event, said solving such problems will require political compromise and inter-agency cooperation among local, state and federal officials.

"It is imperative that we come together as one community in rejection of this violence, which has claimed too many innocent lives," Zeldin said.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), who attended the event, said, "Gangs are violent entities that profit off the misery of others. They poison our young people. They poison



Rep. Lee Zeldin, left, and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte Monday in Riverhead.

those suffering from addiction, turn vulnerable girls into sex slaves and commit flagrant acts of street violence to intimidate civilians and other gangs."

MS-13 is believed to be responsible for 17 Suffolk murders during a 16-month period in 2016 and 2017, according to Suffolk County police. Among the victims, police said, was Justin Llivicura, 16, of East Patchogue, who along with three others was found murdered in a Central Islip park in April 2017.

Llivicura's parents, who attended the roundtable, said their son must not have died in vain. "He wasn't supposed to be killed," his mother, Blanca Zhicay, said through an interpreter. "He was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Gerard Gigante, Suffolk police chief of detectives, said MS-13 has recruited young people brought into the country as unaccompanied minors from countries including Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico and Honduras.

Since 2014, Suffolk has placed about 5,000 unaccompanied children with local families. While most of the children are law-abiding, some fall in with violent gangs, Gigante said.

In May 2017, federal officials launched "Operation Matador" to arrest and deport MS-13 leaders and recruits. The operation led to the arrest of 177 gang members in Suffolk — about 36 percent of them who entered the country as unaccompanied minors, officials said.

Gigante said law enforcement could help address this problem through better vetting of guardians who care for the unaccompanied minors.

Suffolk police, Gigante said, does not have a comprehensive list of all sponsors and has no way to determine if the children are well cared for and taught to steer clear of gangs. "The existing screening of guardians is in dire need of improvement," he said.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement, which places unaccompanied minors, said it prefers to place children with relatives but that all guardians undergo background checks and in some cases home reviews.

While elected officials and law enforcement Monday decried what they described as a broken immigration system, they also stressed the need to create a more efficient guest worker program for East End farms in need of labor.

Outside the event Monday, more than 60 immigration advocates protested what they contend is an effort by Zeldin and other Republicans to demonize all undocumented immigrants as gang members.

The advocates also complained that Zeldin's staff prevented them from attending the event.

Zeldin, who is running for reelection against Democrat Perry Gershon, said activists had announced on social media that they planned to "disrupt" the meeting.

## Survey: 2.1M teens have vaped pot

The Associated Press

A school-based survey shows nearly 1 in 11 U.S. students have used marijuana in electronic cigarettes, heightening concern about the new popularity of vaping among teens.

E-cigarettes typically contain nicotine, but results published Monday mean 2.1 million middle and high school students have used them to get high.

Vaping is generally considered less dangerous than smoking, because burning tobacco or marijuana generates chemicals harmful to lungs. But there is little research on

e-cigarettes' long-term effects, including whether they help smokers quit.

The rise in teenagers using e-cigarettes has alarmed health officials who worry kids will get addicted to nicotine and be more likely to try cigarettes. Last week, the Food and Drug Administration gave the five largest e-cigarette makers 60 days to produce plans to stop underage use.

Nearly 9 percent of students surveyed in 2016 said they used an e-cigarette device with marijuana, according to Monday's report in the journal JAMA Pediatrics. That included one-third of those

who ever used e-cigarettes.

The number is worrying "because cannabis use among youth can adversely affect learning and memory and may impair later academic achievement and education," said lead researcher Katrina Trivers of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

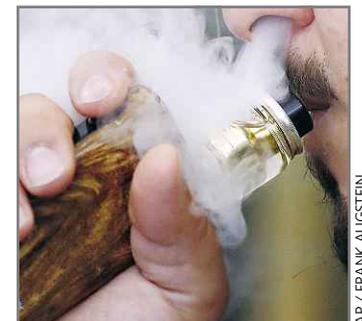
Students who said they lived with a tobacco user were more likely than others to report vaping marijuana.

It's unclear whether marijuana vaping is increasing among teens or holding steady. The devices have grown into a multibillion industry, but they

are relatively new.

In states where marijuana is legal, shoppers can buy cartridges of liquid containing THC, the chemical in marijuana that gets people high, that work with a number of devices. Juul, by far the most popular e-cigarette device, does not offer marijuana pods, but users can refill cartridges with cannabis oil.

It was the first time a question about marijuana vaping was asked on this particular survey, which uses a nationally representative sample of students in public and private schools. More than 20,000 students took the survey in 2016.



Vaping typically involves tobacco, which has nicotine.

A survey from the University of Michigan in December found similar results when it asked for the first time about marijuana vaping. In that study, 8 percent of 10th-graders said they vaped marijuana in the past year.