

Suffolk police earmark U.S. grants

BY NICOLE FULLER

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The federal government has awarded grants totaling nearly \$4 million to the Suffolk County Police Department for its fight against the MS-13 street gang and human trafficking and the installation of a streamlined computer records system, county officials said.

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart said Monday the three Department of Justice grants bring the amount of federal government funding received by the department this year to \$10.3 million — surpassing the \$7.5 million of 2017. Hart said the department, which still has some pending

federal grant applications, could bring in as much as \$12 million for police department initiatives before the year ends.

The police department's gang intervention efforts, targeting youth susceptible to gang recruitment with after-school and mentoring programs — namely unaccompanied minors, the recent influx of Central American immigrants who crossed the border illegally without an adult and were placed with sponsors across the country, including on Long Island — will see an influx of \$1 million. Some of the victims and perpetrators in the spate of suspected MS-13-connected killings on Long Island since 2016 have been unaccompanied minors.

"We'll have the opportunity now to kind of reintroduce ourselves," said Hart. The department will work with local nonprofits to provide the programming. "If there's a void to fill, we would like to fill it versus the gangs, right, because we know that when they come over here, and the support is not what it should be, sometimes these kids get caught up in gang activity."

Another \$696,000 in DOJ funding for the department's newly established human trafficking unit — the first of its kind on Long Island — will help pay for social services, such as drug treatment, counseling and job training for victims. Hart said the department will work with victim advocacy group Empow-

erment Collaborative of Long Island to provide services.

And \$2.1 million of the funds is dedicated to complying with a federally mandated overhaul of the police department's records management system, which includes tracking crime statistics.

The DOJ has mandated that departments nationwide switch from using Uniform Crime Reports to using the National Incident-Based Reporting System.

The funding will help pay for the other 18 law enforcement agencies in Suffolk to begin using the system, which Hart said will increase efficiency and provide more detailed crime trend analysis.

"It's really an opportunity now for us to get a better vision

of the crime issue and how we can deal with it with our assets here on Long Island," she said.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, whose proposed \$3.11 billion operating budget for 2019 raises police district taxes 3.5 percent, said the grants would allow the police department to use creative crime-fighting methods despite tight budgetary times.

"What you're trying to accomplish is utilizing grants to innovate in maybe ways that you can't in a tough budget environment," he said. "But those grants can allow you to push the environment a little bit and do some of the innovation you'd like to see that can have a positive impact on public safety."

LI schools rally for more state funding

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND

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Hundreds of students, teachers and other supporters from a growing coalition of financially strapped Long Island school districts jammed a Tuesday rally in Mineola to underline their fight for additional state financial aid.

District leaders, who called their school systems a "coalition of the underfunded," demanded hundreds of millions of dollars in added support from Albany. Student representatives, meanwhile, protested what they described as overcrowded classes and curtailed school schedules.

The push for more education dollars is led by the Brentwood district, which announced in March that it would file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, charging state officials with shortchanging its mostly minority schools. Since then, five additional districts with similar demographics also have signed on to the drive.

"We're looking to make New York honest again," said Robert Troiano, president of the Westbury school board and one of



Representatives of a coalition of LI districts rally in Mineola Tuesday for renewed state attention to underfunded schools.

the rally's main speakers.

Other districts represented at the Mineola gathering were Brentwood, Hempstead, Uniondale and Wyandanch. Central Islip also has signaled support.

Morris Peters, a spokesman for the state's Division of Budget, responded by saying the five districts represented at the rally had received aid increases averaging 48 percent since 2012 — 13 percentage points above

the state average.

"The state's education aid formula drives funding to higher-poverty schools and schools with high numbers of English-language learners," Peters said.

A target of coalition leaders is the state's Foundation Aid formula, which is the main vehicle used to distribute billions of dollars in school assistance.

Established in 2007, foundation aid originally was in-

tended to boost assistance by a total of \$5.5 billion over four years, with a focus on districts with concentrations of impoverished students. The commitment was partially met over the following two years, but then broke down in the wake of an economic recession.

The state continues to take a progressive approach in supporting poorer school districts.

For example, the six districts supporting Tuesday's rally draw about 60 percent of their funding on average from state and federal sources, which is double the outside support afforded districts Islandwide.

Still, coalition organizers contend that 84 districts Islandwide would gain another \$871 million in funding for 2018-19, if the original foundation pledge was fully met.