

Town of Arlington

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Town of Arlington Announces Resolution to Vandalism and Hate Speech Incident at High School

The following is a statement from Arlington Town Manager Adam Chapdelaine, Police Chief Frederick Ryan, Superintendent of Schools Kathleen Bodie, David Swanson,

*Naomi Greenfield Human Rights Commission Co-Chairs, and Anna Watson,
LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission, Chairperson:*

Two weeks ago, a disturbing discovery of criminal vandalism and hate speech was made at Arlington High School.

Arlington Police responded to the incident on Wednesday, May 2, 2018 at 5:42 a.m. to investigate a report of damage and graffiti. Investigating police officers noted that someone or a group of people had entered the building, likely overnight. Several fire extinguishers had been used and damaged, and there was damage to vending machines, display cases, and an emergency defibrillator inside the school. Spray paint was also used inside and outside of the school.

One swastika and two anti-gay slurs were painted outside of the building. The police department and school district opened an investigation and 14 male students were quickly identified as the suspects responsible for the break-in, vandalism, and hate speech.

Reflecting on this situation, identifying those responsible for these acts was a matter of investigatory procedure. The difficult task now lay in determining the proper response and consequences for those responsible – be it any combination of punishment, restitution, and repair of the breach of peace, security, and sense of safety in the community.

What occurred earlier this month was deeply upsetting on a multitude of levels, and it does not represent either the image we have in mind for our community or the beliefs of

our residents and young people. While the actions of a few students are truly heinous, we have the chance now to emerge stronger than ever before as a community, and the plan our leadership team has put forward says in a clear voice that we intend to do just that.

In the hours and days after the incident, we have been overwhelmed by the amazingly positive response from the rest of the students at Arlington High School and really the entire community as a whole. Messages of hate were immediately replaced en masse by messages of love, tolerance, acceptance, and compassion.

We immediately turned to the members of the Arlington Human Rights Commission and the newly-formed Arlington LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission, as well as our long-term trusted partners in the Anti-Defamation League to determine the best course of action.

Arlington is a founding member of the organization Communities for Restorative Justice, a non-profit collaboration of communities and police departments that offers restorative justice to those affected by crime. The organization's "circle" process recognizes that crime is a violation of people and relationships, not just a violation of law. Newly passed legislation on Beacon Hill expands the restorative justice model and authorizes its use to deal with certain cases.

The Arlington Police Department has reached out to all 14 offenders and their families and has offered each the opportunity to go through the restorative justice process, which exists in three phases:

- Victims of crime are given the opportunity to address those who have harmed them, to ask questions in a safe environment, and to share ideas on ways that the harm can be repaired.
- Offenders better understand the impact of their actions, are held accountable, make financial restitution and encouraged to make amends to those they have harmed.
- The community offers support for the process, strengthening community connections, and engaging in matters of concern to its members.

Most importantly, restorative justice requires buy-in from both the offenders and the victims in a given situation. The offenders would be working directly with members of the school community, Jewish community, and LGBTQIA+ community on a long-term process.

Those not willing to participate in the restorative process will have their case prosecuted in court. Restorative justice will allow the suspects to right their wrongs without receiving a criminal record or a court arraignment that could follow them for lives. The students still face individual discipline from the Arlington Public Schools including suspension and exclusion from senior and other school events. We recognize that it is faster and easier to arrest and prosecute these individuals rather than go through the restorative justice process, which requires more of a commitment from the offender. However, we believe that this proposed solution will bring everyone into the same room and provide opportunities for long-term growth, education, healing, and a repair of this breach in our community.

In Arlington, we do not run from a crisis; we embrace it as an opportunity to be better and do better. With restorative justice, we seek to foster a frank and honest dialogue of how we treat each other.

If we can all learn how and why this happened, perhaps we can prevent it from happening again.

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