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## In Haverhill Monday, Gov. Baker Gets Close-Up View of Anti-Gang Violence Effort

By **Tim Coco** | May 6, 2019

Gov. Charlie Baker joined local and state officials this morning to receive a progress report on UTEC's anti-gang violence program that was spurred by the shooting death of a 20-year-old almost a year ago.

The meeting, taking place about a month before UTEC's formal opening at 241 Winter St., Haverhill, provided insight into how Lowell-based UTEC staff engage gang members. UTEC CEO Gregg Croteau said he was moved following the murder of Nike Colon last May 17.



*Haverhill Rep. Andy Vargas speaks as Mayor James J. Fiorentini, Gov. Charlie Baker and Police Chief Alan R. DeNaro look on. (WHAV News photograph.)*

“Within 24 hours of that, I got a call from the mother of Nike. She was calling me, simply to say, ‘thank you,’ because streetworkers she hadn’t known yet—Carlos and Eric—had been there the moment it happened,” he said.

Croteau thanked state officials—particularly, whom he called “relentless” state Rep. Andy Vargas—for making possible the \$682,000 grant to allow UTEC to enter Haverhill. Vargas said he became familiar with the group as a youth when he and his peers toured and observed the positive environment in Lowell. He noted staff members’ “corny but amazing” mood checks, which they performed as if on cue, shouting “UTEK.”

Vargas said UTEC offers young people an alternative and a “another path.” The grant, from the state’s Executive Office Health and Human Services, is part of the

Baker said it is very clear to him that UTEC doesn't give up on anyone. "What the folks involved in UTEC appreciate the most is the fact that the street workers and staff don't quit."

Croteau thanked Essex County Sheriff Kevin F. Coppinger, Police Chief Alan R. DeNaro and Deputy Chief Anthony Haugh, who were all present, for working together to solve the gang violence problem. DeNaro said his department is now focused on rehabilitation and lifestyle alternatives rather than just arrests. For example, he said, he met with Northern Essex Community College President Lane A. Glenn about coming up with a scholarship program to allow at-risk youth to receive an education.

Mayor James J. Fiorentini said he believes the availability of good jobs will help solve many problems.

Ziomara Otero told visitors she is trying to get into college and work toward becoming a physician. In the meantime, thanks to UTEC, she will accept training in construction. "Honestly, I came to UTEC to get my life together and to become a better person for myself and kids," she told the governor.

Besides Vargas, the city's entire legislative delegation attended, including Sen. Diana DiZoglio; Reps. Linda Dean Campbell, Lenny Mirra and Christina Minicucci.