I am humbled by such a kind introduction and honored to be before you this third Sunday of our new year, on the weekend we celebrate the birth, life and service of Dr. Martin Luther King, a champion of non-violence who followed in the footsteps of many others, from Mahatma Gandhi to Jesus Christ. Some might think it odd to talk of non-violence and peace at a military school, but how can Valley Forge Military Academy and College fulfill its mission to educate cadets to be fully prepared for their responsibilities as citizen leaders without speaking to this great responsibility of peacemaking? Peacemaking ties perfectly into the virtue of service that is being highlighted this month here.

I am a lawyer so I look at peacemaking through the prism of the law. I am delighted to be joined here by three other attorney guests. My wife, Donna Adelsberger, is here in a dual role to both support me but also to provide a model of service as a lawyer who devotes hundreds of hours each year to help children try to find peace as they interact with the justice and social service systems. Attorney Wes Payne and Judge Cheryl Austin, both veterans, also join me here today in those dual roles. I am delighted by their support, but I am even more pleased to be able to share, with all of you, these two exceptional public servants. Mr. Payne, a former Army JAG officer who is a partner in the law firm of White and Williams in Philadelphia, devotes a tremendous amount of volunteer time to veterans and active duty and reserve service persons in need. He chairs the Military and Veterans Affairs Committee of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, a committee I staff, and he provides direct legal service to homeless veterans in
soup kitchens and veterans who have lost their way and have criminal matters in our special veterans’ courts. Mr. Payne was on this campus last year to testify at a special state hearing in favor of such programs for veterans. Judge Austin, a retired Navy Captain, presides over family court matters for the Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas, working to provide justice for families in times of distress and helping them to find non-violent solutions to their problems. Prior to winning election to the bench, she served as a co-chair of the PBA Military and Veterans Committee and she served many in that role.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'" He would find in the Five Cornerstones of Valley Forge Military Academy and College the foundation for a life of service in the pursuit of non-violence and peace. Academic Excellence, Character Development, Personal Motivation, Physical Development and Leadership all are the ingredients, perhaps even the prerequisites, for being able to help create a community here and to help support a world beyond these walls that embraces peace.

I was invited into the Valley Forge Military Academy and College community last year to share my anti-bullying expertise with the staff. Dan Olweus, creator of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, defines bullying as:

"A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself."

This definition includes three important components:
1. Bullying is aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.

2. Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.

3. Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength.

In his writings, Dr. Olweus makes very clear that bullying is peer abuse that should not be tolerated under any circumstances. 49 of the 50 states have laws defining bullying; many of those laws provide either or both civil and criminal sanctions for the bullying. Bullying is a form of violence that destroys the peace of the community.

Valley Forge Military Academy and College has a clear anti-bullying policy. Cadets pledge to not bully others, to try to help cadets who are bullied, to make it a point to include cadets who are easily left out, and to inform their TAC Officer and another adult at school when someone, whether themselves or another, is being bullied. Anyone reporting bullying, even if the report is made outside the chain of command, is not to face discipline consequences for making the report.

The commitment of Valley Forge Military Academy and College to the Plebe System means that cadets will often be tested in circumstances where they will learn to place the concept of duty above personal desires. The Plebe System is not a form of bullying because its intent is to build character. Those in positions of power implementing the Plebe System have a duty to protect all involved from abuse. Rules of conduct for the Plebe System are clearly established and behavior that goes beyond those norms must be reported and cannot be tolerated.

As “bullycide” has become an accepted term of art in public discourse about bullying prevention — Google the term and you will find over 100,000 references-- many who care about
young people in school settings, from public schools to private schools such as Valley Forge Military Academy and College, have looked to the law for answers. Parents, educators, students, law and justice professionals, and legislators have worked to use existing laws and craft new laws to protect young people targeted for bullying.

Much bullying behavior involves actions that could be viewed as crimes under existing laws in every state in the country, but the focus here at Valley Forge Military Academy and College in response to bullying has not been the criminalization of bullying. Zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies and criminal prosecution of bullying fail to stop bullying from happening. Criminally prosecuting a person who bullies another may provide specific deterrence as that person is stopped from bullying others, but there is no wider deterrent effect. Punishment alone does not work to stop bullying behavior. There is more hope in following restorative, not punitive, justice principles. Since the philosophy of Valley Forge Military Academy and College is to improve the total individual in a comprehensive system of self and group improvement, the anti-bullying approach at Valley Forge Military Academy and College is early identification of bullying behavior with immediate intervention to protect the student victimized, with consequences provided for the perpetrator that includes education about the disservice to the community such behavior brings. Within the existing culture of Valley Forge Military Academy and College, there is a fine line between corps discipline, adherence to the chain of command and bullying. Vigilance is required to maintain that line and each member of this community must be willing to stand up for others in need.

Although bullying has been an issue probably since schools were first formed, significant attention to bullying came after the April 20, 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado. Many early media accounts of the Columbine tragedy reported that the shootings were
retaliation by the shooters against students who had bullied them. Such media attention often results in legislation being drafted in almost a knee-jerk fashion, and in that spirit, anti-bullying laws did follow Columbine. Skip a little more than a decade ahead in time and you can see the same media driven pattern occur as the suicide of Tyler Clementi helped push through significant revisions to New Jersey’s anti-bullying law. Developments in technology that are highlighted in the Clementi matter add a new element to efforts to craft laws that can protect students who are bullied, as the reach of those who would target others is now seemingly unlimited. Cyberbullying is the area where the law seems most at a crossroads of development as courts try to apply legal concepts created before technological advances raised implications unimagined by the jurists of earlier times.

This may seem strange to hear from a lawyer, but the law is not the answer here. Doing enough to satisfy the law is often not doing enough—legal obligations generally provide far less direction than professional and moral duties. This is why the work to promote peace by eliminating the violence of bullying at Valley Forge Military Academy and College is noteworthy. Here is a place where words like duty and service are not meant to be just words in the Guidon. This is a place where those words are intended to come alive and where looking out for each other is not just a nice thing some people do but an expectation of personal and corps responsibility.

Dr. King believed that “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” The journey of Valley Forge Military Academy and College in championing the peace of anti-bullying is also a long one. King’s violent death reminds us that those who fight to bend that arc to justice face opposition; the drum majors of peace do not go unnoticed or unchallenged. I have had the easy job, to work with people of character and skill to help move
the march forward. Though I hope my work with Valley Forge Military Academy and College is not over, the hard work of making this community a better place for everyone, of being the champions here, on a daily basis, of non-violence and peace, falls to all of you. I wish you all the best in your journey and offer whatever support I may provide.

Blessed are the peacemakers.