

## Gwendolyn Williams P'17 Talks Criminal Justice Ethics With VI Form Students



Terence Gilheany, Jan 20 2017

On Friday evening, January 13, Gwendolyn Williams P'17 talked with VI Form ethics students about criminal justice ethics and reform. Ms. Williams is the mother of Brianna Adams '17 and serves as the Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor for New Jersey's Essex County Prosecutor's Office. Ms. Williams introduced the gathering to her work, and spoke to the ethical requirements and challenges raised by that work. Ethics students (who have been studying the ethics of the criminal justice system) "raised insightful questions about criminal justice reform," said Religious Studies Department Chair Terence Gilheany. "Ms. Williams and the group discussed the rights of victims, racial justice, mental illness, bail reform, and juvenile justice."

"I found Ms. Williams' discussion of monetary bail particularly fascinating," said Kathryn Paton '17, who attended the talk. Williams explained that Essex County had recently changed their bail policy to allow most pre-trial defendants (except for the most violent offenders) to be released pending prosecution. "A monetary bail policy aggressively privileges the wealthy," Kathryn recalled of the discussion, "but not incarcerating certain violent criminals before trial gives them the potential to do harm." The group also discussed the relative merits of punitive processes versus rehabilitative social program and how both approaches to "justice" intersect with Williams' work, and the role of forgiveness in the justice system, particularly with regard to victims' rights. "I would love to learn more about rehabilitation in the justice system," Kathryn said, "because both her talk and our recent work in class has sparked in me an interest in understanding how to make justice more efficient and productive, while still being just and humane."

"Before her talk, I had vaguely understood the role of the prosecutor as being against the defendant," Kathryn concluded, "but she really underlined how ethically and legally the prosecution is required to bring any uncovered possibly defending information to the defense. She helped me see how criminal justice is less a battle and more a collaborative process, albeit one fraught with competing personal and ethical concerns."