



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins Leads State Senate Passage of Legislation to Protect and Support Domestic Violence Survivors

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS May 16, 2025



(Albany, NY) – This week, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins led the State Senate in passing a **comprehensive legislative package** to protect survivors of domestic violence and remove barriers to justice, safety, and stability. The bills would address long standing legal loopholes and improve access to critical resources for survivors across Westchester County and New York State.

The legislation includes measures to prioritize housing for domestic violence survivors, require police to conduct lethality assessments during domestic violence calls, improve compensation for crime victims, and allow survivors to exit shared contracts without financial penalty. It also provides stronger protections against stalking, coerced debt, and the use of intoxication as a legal defense in sexual assault cases.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, “As elected officials, we have a moral responsibility to protect survivors of domestic violence and ensure they are not left to navigate systems that fail them. This legislative package breaks down barriers, improves access to justice, and reflects our unwavering commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of every survivor. In Westchester and across our state, these bills will make a real difference in the lives of those working to reclaim safety and rebuild their futures.”

Hope’s Door Executive Director CarlLa Horton said, “Hope’s Door commends Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and the New York State Senate on passing critical legislation to help protect victims of domestic violence. Hope’s Door, which has provided safety and support to victims for more than 45 years, is especially gratified for the passage of legislation which will require police officers to take temporary custody of firearms following an arrest for family violence. All of us who work in this field know that access to a gun is a key lethality risk factor, increasing the chance of a victim’s death by more than 500 percent. We are also pleased to see provisions which will require law enforcement officers in New York to receive training on the use of lethality assessments, which we have done across Westchester for the last four years. This package will go a long way in enhancing the safety, independence, and healing of survivors.”

Bills in the package include the following:

Clarifies and Expands the Meaning of “Welfare” in Relation to Crime Victim Awards: This law would ensure that survivors can be compensated for essential personal property lost, stolen, or damaged during a crime, providing a path toward stability.

Establishes Statewide Public Housing Waiting List Priorities for Domestic Violence Survivors:

Would give domestic violence survivors the same priority as other vulnerable populations when applying for public housing, helping them access safe and stable homes.

Combatting Coerced Debt: Will allow survivors of domestic violence to take legal action against debts incurred under threat or abuse, addressing a common form of financial control.

Removing ‘Voluntary Intoxication’ Exclusion: Would prohibit the use of a victim’s voluntary intoxication as a defense in sex crime cases, ensuring survivors cannot be blamed for their own victimization.

Requires Police to Take Temporary Custody of Firearms When Responding to Family Violence Reports: Would require law enforcement to take temporary custody of firearms when responding to family violence calls, providing an added layer of safety.

Protects Domestic Violence Survivors in Shared Contracts: This law will enable domestic violence survivors to be released from shared financial contracts, such as leases or phone plans, without penalty.

Redefines “Following” for Stalking in the Fourth Degree: Would broaden the definition of stalking to include electronic tracking through devices or apps without consent.

Codifies Lethality Assessment Requirements: This law would require police officers to receive training and conduct lethality assessments to identify survivors at risk of serious harm during domestic violence incidents.

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