



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

Senate Democrats Form New Task Force To Help Eradicate Domestic Violence In New York Homes

MALCOLM A. SMITH June 16, 2008

(Albany, NY) Senate Democrats are calling for tougher laws on domestic abusers and holistic family support systems for victims in New York as the number of incidents continue to increase in some parts of New York.

Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Bronx/Mount Vernon) has formed the Senate Minority Task Force on Domestic Violence to look at new ways to combat the escalation in violent acts committed against family members, loved ones and children. A key component of the 10-member Task Force will be to review current legislation and state programs to determine whether consolidation is needed.

Hassell-Thompson said that ultimate goal is to keep families together.

“The escalation of violence in the home has a negative impact on every mother, father and child in a family,” said Senator Hassell-Thompson, Chair of the Task Force. “Some current procedures for handling domestic violence cases are erratic because there is no uniformity or conformity among law enforcement officials.”

Senator Hassell-Thompson said that New York state’s diversity also plays a role.

“Knowing that culture plays a major role in how domestic violence is viewed we must ensure that the upmost sensitivity is employed when providing services to victims,” Senator Hassell-Thompson said. “Through the creation of this Task Force the Senate Democratic Conference takes the stance that domestic violence is unacceptable.”

According to a five-year study by the State Department of Criminal Justice Services, there were up to 450,000 domestic incidents reported to police departments throughout the state from 2001 to 2005. Last year, New York City Police responded to 229,354 domestic violence incidents-about 600 incidents per day. The same year, domestic violence investigators made 76,602 home visits, a 98 percent increase since 2002.

Strikingly, federal statistics show that more than half of all domestic crimes went unreported.

The new Task Force will work in conjunction with the related Domestic Violence Advisory Committee. Together both entities will refocus statewide efforts to stop domestic abuse and to assure that action is always on the minds of state leaders.

State Senate Democratic Leader Malcolm Smith said, “Domestic Violence should never be in the shadows.”

“Victims of domestic abuse can carry their physical and emotional scars for a lifetime,” said Senator Smith (D-St.Albans). “We all must look to bolster and improve support for victims, as well as, to strengthen measures to combat continued acts of domestic violence.”

Members of the Senate Minority Task Force on Domestic Violence, include Democratic Senators Smith, Hassell-Thompson, Eric Adams (D-Brooklyn), Darrel J. Aubertine (D-Cape Vincent), Neil Breslin (D-Albany), Efrain Gonzalez Jr. (D-Bronx), Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan), Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck), Kevin Parker (D-Brooklyn) and Eric Schneiderman (D-

Manhattan/Bronx).

Each senator will appoint two members to the Task Force's Advisory Committee. The committee will engage in open dialogue throughout the state with social workers, victims and community members.

Using community recommendations as a compass, the Task Force will reshape how lawmakers examine domestic violence, victim services and community outreach.

Senator Smith said that the ultimate goals of this renewed effort to eradicate domestic violence is to improve services for victims and survivors and toughen penalties for abusers.

Currently, there are nearly 50 domestic violence bills in both houses to strengthen protections and penalties. Using committee recommendations the Task Force will set out to meet the challenges each family faces when confronted with domestic violence issues. Through family, community and education outreach, hopefully, new solutions will be found to understanding the causes and ways to prevent domestic violence.

Senator Hassell-Thompson said that the committee will be committed to increasing public awareness. It will also suggest ideas and strategies to improve the delivery of services to victims and survivors. It will also support educational efforts and advocate for victims and their families.

"The purpose of both the Task Force and committee is to look at and take on a new approach as to how we deal with domestic abuse," said Senate Democratic Whip Kevin Parker. "First and foremost, we need to look to our community members statewide who is impacted by domestic abuse. We need from them what can work better in supporting all victims."

State Senator Liz Krueger said: “Ultimately, the goal is to create policy that will end domestic violence. There is legislation out there that runs the course of domestic abuse issues from bolstering children services, the shuffling of administrative and judicial roles, to enhancement of penal codes. However, they are only the gambits of change until they become law.”

Krueger added that the work of the Task Force and Advisory Committee could help strengthen legislation. In 19 other states, recent measures have increased penalties for convicted abusers and help protect the identities of domestic abuse victims.