



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Domestic Violence Awareness Day

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October 14, 2009

ISSUE:

- [Crime](#)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: OCTOBER 9, 2009

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Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence

Klein Holds Domestic Violence Awareness Day, urging the Assembly to pass new legislation that would better protect Domestic Violence Victims and presents grants to Domestic Violence Prevention Organizations

NEW YORK- In light of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, today Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) held a Domestic Violence Awareness Day.

Klein kicked off his Domestic Violence Awareness Day outside the Criminal Courthouse in Manhattan, promoting new legislation that would provide greater protection to victims of Domestic Violence. Klein was joined by Assemblyman Steven Cymbrowitz, representatives from New Destiny Housing, PACE Women's Justice Center, Safe Horizon and My Sisters' Place, Domestic Violence Victims Wanda Roman and her 17 year old daughter, Tina Marie Diaz.

According to a new NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) report, the rate of homicides related to Domestic Violence increased by 7.3% in NYS from 2007 to 2008. In NYC, the domestic homicide rate increased by 2.7% during the same time. The report also states that domestic homicides accounted for 14.3% of all homicides in NYC and 23.5% of all homicides outside of the city. Arguments accounted for nearly seventy percent (68.7%) of the cause of domestic homicides overall in NYS. The Bronx had the most intimate partner murders at a total of 16.

At the press conference, domestic violence victim Wanda Roman recounted how she left her home in Newark, NJ after her live-in boyfriend verbally and physically abused her and sexually abused her daughter. Tina Marie, her daughter, was 11 years old at the time of the abuse and remains a special needs child. Roman fled New Jersey with Tina Marie as well as her three sons and moved to Massachusetts where she secured a job and purchased a car. Within six months, her abuser tracked her down, forcing Roman to flee again, this time to the Bronx. In the Bronx, she stayed in a shelter owned by My Sister's Place. Her daughter needed medication but Roman had a difficult time with her insurance company regarding coverage. Roman said her insurance company required she submit a change of address with a home phone number related to that address and that the company wouldn't allow her to use a Post Office Box. Roman didn't want to give the company the actual physical address where she resided because she feared her attacker would use it to find her and domestic violence shelters do not allow addresses to be made public. In addition, Roman lost her car because three car insurance companies turned her down for the same reason. My Sisters' Place ended up paying for the medication. Now, Roman works at My Sisters' Place in the legal department.

"I am grateful to so many people for helping me to achieve a life of safety and independence," said Wanda Roman, "The legislation the Senator is proposing is to protect people exactly like me and my daughter. How fortunate another woman will be when she is able to get the medicine she needs for herself or her child without fear of exposing herself to her batterer."

Klein's bill (S5980) requires insurance companies to give domestic violence victims the option of registering an alternative address, phone number or any other contact information needed to receive bills and claims.

"Under current law, it's too easy for attackers to track down their victims through insurance claims and bills," said Klein. "In many cases, when victims see a doctor, their insurance policy is under their abuser's name so all claims and bills are sent directly to the abuser's home. That makes it easy for abusers to find out their victims whereabouts therefore putting victims in danger."

Klein's legislation would prevent claims and bills from being mailed to the victim's attacker's address and instead be mailed directly to the victim. The bill would allow victims to provide an address where they feel safe such as a family member or friend's home, a post office box or shelter. The legislation already passed the Senate and Klein is urging the Assembly to sign it into law.

"Victims of domestic violence should not have to think twice about going to a doctor or hospital because of concern over where their insurance paperwork will be sent. These individuals are particularly vulnerable and need the ability to keep their insurance information away from the person who has been abusing them. This is why I have introduced legislation in the Assembly (A.4052), like Senator Klein's bill, that would require insurance companies to send claims and billing correspondence to an alternate address when asked to do so by a victim of domestic violence," said Assemblyman Cymbrowitz who sponsored a companion bill in the Assembly.

Klein continued his Domestic Violence Awareness Day with three check presentations to New Destiny Housing, My Sisters' Place and PACE Women's Justice Center.

The Senator first stopped at New Destiny Housing's newest affordable housing project, Marcello Manor in the Bronx. After touring the facility, Klein presented the organization with a \$5,000 check. The money will be used for a program called HousingLink, a citywide program operated by New Destiny that provides information, one-on-one counseling, and training to victims of domestic violence seeking permanent housing.

"Safe, affordable permanent housing is the most pressing need of women and children fleeing domestic violence," said New Destiny Executive Director Carol Corden. "New Destiny is grateful to Senator Klein for supporting HousingLink, New

York City's only housing information resource specifically for domestic violence survivors."

Klein then presented a \$15,000 check to My Sisters' Place for its civil legal services program and a \$10,000 check to PACE Women's Justice Center for community workshops on domestic violence.

"We applaud New York State Senator Klein's initiative to help ensure the confidentiality and safety of domestic violence survivors. Being safe is paramount and giving survivors the option of providing an alternative address to receive notices, bills and claims, will help in maintaining confidentiality and may even save lives," said Jane Aoyama-Martin, Executive Director of the Women's Justice Center at Pace University School of Law.

"My Sisters' Place is honored to receive this vital support from Senator Klein", said Karen Cheeks-Lomax, Esq., Executive Director of My Sisters' Place. "The Senator has always shown great sensitivity to our work to end intimate partner abuse and to change the culture in which it is allowed to fester. This piece of legislation affords victims the ability to provide a secure change of address to their insurance company as an integral part of safety planning for the victim working to create a life free from abuse. We are proud of our civil legal services program, and thank the senator for his continued support which enables the My Sisters' Place Legal team to represent our clients in the judicial system."

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