



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Suzi Oppenheimer Stands with Women's Advocacy Groups to Urge Governor Paterson to Enact New Protections for Domestic Violence Survivors

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While violent crime overall has declined in recent years, violence against loved ones is on the rise. In 2008, intimate partner homicides increased 25% statewide and 45% in counties outside New York City. Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck), joined by representatives from the Pace Women's Justice Center, My Sisters' Place, Hope's Door and Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, today called on Governor Paterson to sign into law sweeping legislation to strengthen the rights and protections of domestic violence survivors and increase the criminal penalties for domestic abuse.

More than 400,000 incidents of domestic violence are reported to police departments in New York every year, while 300,000 calls are received by domestic violence hotlines throughout the state. Indeed, 20 percent of all assaults occurring outside New York City are committed by "intimate partners." New York's Domestic Violence Courts handled more than 31,000 cases in 2008, an increase of nearly 7,000 from 2007.

"The heinous crime of domestic violence affects New Yorkers across all age, race and socio-economic boundaries," observed Senator Oppenheimer. "As a member of the Senate Task Force on Domestic Violence, I am keenly aware of the pervasive and lingering repercussions of domestic abuse on survivors and their children. The bills we have enacted will afford victims precious time to reclaim their lives by shielding their identity and location from abusers, strengthening the penalties

against their attackers, and precluding discrimination against them in housing and employment.”

The Senate’s 12-bill package responds to the epidemic of violence by:

- Preserving the confidentiality of a survivor’s identity when applying for state and local programs, filing medical claims and voting;
- Prohibiting housing and employment discrimination against victims of domestic abuse and requiring employers to make reasonable accommodations for work absences due to medical or legal matters relating to abuse;
- Increasing the penalties for witness tampering and repeat offenders of orders of protection;
- Creating enhanced crimes of first and second degree strangulation;
- Easing the process of courts and law enforcement officials when issuing or extending orders of protection against abusers.

A more detailed summary of these bills is appended to this release.

Jane Aoyama-Martin, Executive Director of the Women’s Justice Center at Pace University School of Law, said: “The Pace Women’s Justice Center applauds the NYS legislature for passing meaningful bills that reflect society’s increased understanding of the impact of domestic violence on women and children. These important bills are significant in providing domestic violence victims and survivors with more protections so that they may move forward with their lives, free from violence. We join in urging Governor Paterson to sign these new laws.”

“We commend Senators Suzi Oppenheimer, Ruth Hassell-Thompson, John Sampson, Malcolm Smith and all our Senate colleagues for this comprehensive legislative package on behalf of survivors of domestic violence,” said Karen Cheeks-Lomax, Executive Director of My Sister’s Place. “What we see here speaks volumes to their commitment to end violence against women and their children. Specifically, the legislation that was passed is practical, addressing specific needs that will enhance

the ability of a survivor and her family to continue their lives in a safe, productive way."

"This legislation can be the difference between living with and without fear for thousands of victims of domestic violence and their children throughout the state," said Barbara Finkelstein, Executive Director of Legal Services of the Hudson Valley.

"Equally important, given today's difficult economic times and the growing demand for protections by those who can't afford legal counsel in civil cases, it raises hopes that the benefits of the proposed bills will be felt across all economic classes.

We're happy to add our voice to those calling for immediate enactment."

"We applaud Senator Oppenheimer for speaking out in support of new legislation to protect victims of domestic violence, said Carla Horton, Executive Director of Hope's Door. "Not only will such laws protect survivors, it will show that New York State will not tolerate this criminal activity. Most importantly, this legislation will reinforce what we know to be true—domestic abuse is not a private matter. It is a critical national problem that affects us all."

"In times of economic stress, the risk of abusive conduct increases," observed Senator Oppenheimer. "While New York has excellent law enforcement, medical and support services to respond to incidents of domestic violence, we must remain vigilant and implement changes in the law that will strengthen our ability to support victims of domestic violence and their families. I am proud to stand here with these women's organizations whose tireless efforts to eradicate domestic violence and keep victims safe, offer the promise of a new life for thousands of abused women and their families."

Photo Details: Leading women's advocacy groups join Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) in support of legislation to protect domestic violence survivors and their families. From L to R: Carla Horton, Exec. Dir., Hope's Door; Robin, Stiebel, Managing Atty., Yonkers Office, Legal Services for the Hudson Valley; Senator Oppenheimer, Jane Aoyama-Martin, Exec. Dir., Pace Women's Justice Center, Karen Cheeks-Lomax, Exec. Dir., My Sister's Place.