



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Roy J. McDonald

McDonald Looking for More Information on Reported OPWDD Group Home Abuse

ROY J. MCDONALD March 15, 2011

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Albany – March 15 - In light of a recent New York Times article that outlined patient abuse, taunting and sexual assault at group homes, Mental Health Committee Chairman Senator Roy McDonald was joined by Senator Kemp Hannon, Chairman of the Assembly Mental Health Committee Felix Ortiz, and members of the Assembly Mental Health Committee today at the Capitol. The Legislators discussed allegations in the article and potential solutions to solve the reported problems.

“I want to work with the commissioner and Governor Cuomo’s office to get to the bottom of these very serious claims,” said McDonald (R-Saratoga). “Friends and family of loved ones in these homes need assurances that the person they care about is being appropriately cared for.”

An investigative report by the Times published on March 12, showed accusations of abuse were often handled internally and less than 5 percent were referred to law enforcement. The accusations included instances of physical abuse, neglect, sexual assault and taunting. If found to be true, McDonald wants answers.

“It is our responsibility to provide security and safeguards for individuals who are unable to protect themselves. If there are widespread problems then we need to find real solutions, I look forward to working with the Governor and Commissioner to make difficult decisions,” said McDonald.

“We need to take a serious look at the way things have been run and make some meaningful changes. Together with Senator McDonald, I will be introducing a package of bills designed to protect those who have no voice to advocate for themselves. We also will be holding a public hearing to investigate these reports,” said Ortiz (D- Brooklyn).

McDonald & Ortiz invited the newly appointed Commissioner of OPWDD Courtney Burke to a joint meeting of the Assembly and Senate Mental Health Committees.

“After reading the accounts in the NY Times article, we must be concerned and vigilant in protecting vulnerable people with developmental disabilities in our care and providing the resources necessary to deal any abuse or exploitation that may allegedly occur. The Governor’s Medicaid Redesign Team, which I participated in along with OPWDD, OMH and other stakeholders, worked to coordinate a state effort. A similar effort is needed here to ensure that workers who should not be caring for disabled individuals are removed and resources are available to properly investigate and oversee the system,” said Senator Kemp Hannon (R- Garden City).

"The vast majority of direct care givers are decent people who dedicate their lives to caring for others. When abuse of our most vulnerable citizens occurs, the perpetrators must be prosecuted criminally and not by a bureaucratic administrative process. Silent resignations must end, because our current criminal background checks that I got enacted are useless if these crimes go unreported and unprosecuted. We must be the voice for those who cannot speak for themselves,” said Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg (D- Long Beach).

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