



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Senator Ritchie Returns 'Gold Star' Plates

PATTY RITCHIE June 30, 2011

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DMV had denied mother's tribute to her fallen son

State Senator Patty Ritchie today returned two "Gold Star Mother" license plates to an elderly Central New York woman who was forced to surrender them to Motor Vehicles officials who said she couldn't keep them as a tribute to her only son, killed in Vietnam.

Ethel Barnes proudly displayed the plates, bearing the distinctive number "46," to honor and remember her only son, Robert, who died in 1967. DMV required her to turn in the plates

when she said she would no longer be driving, denying her request to keep one as part of a family memorial she had planned for her son.

“For 44 years, Mrs. Barnes has kept these license plates as a memento and tribute to her only son, who sacrificed his life for his country and community,” Senator Ritchie said. “When I learned of her predicament, I immediately took action, and contacted the new Motor Vehicles Commissioner to find a solution that allowed me to return these plates to Mrs. Barnes.”

Sen. Ritchie also credited the tremendous public outpouring on Mrs. Barnes’ behalf, after news reports of the incident, as well as efforts by her fellow Senators Joseph Griffo, Michael Nozzolio, David Valesky, and also Assemblyman Robert Oaks.

“Robert Barnes is an American hero. For enduring the loss of her only son in service to our country, his mother, Ethel, is a hero, too. Returning these ‘Gold Star Mother’ plates to Mrs. Barnes is a small, but deserved tribute to Robert and his family, and I am glad that I was able to help,” said Senator Ritchie.

Senator Ritchie said she would urge the DMV to change its official policy with regard to Gold Star Mother plates. She also has cosponsored legislation with Senators Griffo and Valesky, which passed the Senate, to allow one plate to be kept when surrendering these registrations.

Sen. Ritchie has already discussed with Sen. Griffo the possibility of amending that bill to also allow family members to keep license plates that are issued under some or all of the department’s 36 other distinctive veterans and military series.

