



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

## New law makes prostitution near a school a felony in New York City

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BY Sarah Armaghan

DAILY NEWS WRITER

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State Sen. Ruben Diaz held a rally against prostitution near West Farms Schools in January. He called a law making sex work near the school a felony "a big step in protecting our children".

Harsher penalties for selling sex near school grounds are now in place, thanks to legislation authored by a Bronx senator and signed into law by Gov. Cuomo last week.

State Sen. Ruben Diaz Sr. first proposed the bill that will now slap pimps, prostitutes and johns caught plying their illicit trade within 1,000 feet of a school with automatic felony

charges.

"I'm happy," Diaz said yesterday. "I think that this is a big step in protecting our children."

Years of unchecked prostitution in the playground of PS 6, the West Farms School, on East Tremont Ave. led to the legislation, which is now in effect for schools statewide.

Antoinette Smith, 49, a home attendant, has lived on the same block as the elementary school - which serves 700 students in grades K-5 and a special education program - for the past five years.

She said the discarded condoms, as well as used needles tossed onto the playground by drug users, have her 5-year-old grandson Zaydan Johnson asking questions way beyond his years.

"He would ask what the condoms are and what the needles are," she said of Zaydan, who is entering the first grade at the school this fall. "It makes me feel disgusted. He's only 5 and he knows what's going on."

But not everyone applauded the new law.

In recent weeks, The Urban Justice Center had urged Cuomo to veto the bill in an online petition that traveled the Twittersverse and garnered 339 signatures.

"In the modern era, most sex workers who work on the street are engaged in sex work out of desperate need. They face widespread physical and sexual violence, especially from the police," the petition stated. "For these women, men and children, the criminal justice system is merely a 'revolving door' that hinders rather than helps their chances of stopping sex work."

Calls to The Urban Justice Center were not returned.

Meanwhile, Diaz is calling on the NYPD to make sure the law is enforced.

"You could have as many laws as you want, but if the police do not enforce them, the law becomes nothing," he said.