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Travyvon Martin: History shows that True Justice Still Remains Out of Reach

My deepest condolences go out the family and friends of Trayvon Martin, whose young and precious life was taken away far too soon. The senseless murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black youth, has sparked a national outcry for justice. This has placed a spotlight on the controversial law “Stand Your Ground.” This law gives anyone a license to kill if they “reasonably believe that such force is necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to himself, herself, or another.” The State of Florida has seen homicides almost triple since the law was enacted in 2005. What is even more alarming is that similar laws are already in effect in more than 20 other states and subsequent tragedies could arise. My Senate Democratic colleagues and I cannot and will not support Senate Bill S. 281, which is similar of the “Stand Your Ground” Law in Florida and have demanded that the sponsor of the bill, Republican Senator George Maziarz to withdraw the legislation.

I would like to share my memory of a time when our community thought this sort of senseless killing would not happen again. At 5:00 AM in South Jamaica on April 28, 1973, 10-year-old Clifford Glover was shot. The two officers, Thomas Shea, and his partner, believed the African-American boy and his stepfather were guilty of robbery. Glover and his stepfather were afraid of the two officers and ran from them, believing they themselves were about to be robbed. Glover was hit by at least two bullets.

Residents were outraged and frustrated following the shooting Thomas Shea was put on trial for murder. He was the first New York City police officer ever to be tried for murder while on duty. Shea was declared not guilty on June 12, 1974.

We thought that this would never happen again. However, the tragic murder of Sean Bell in 2006 in Jamaica, Queens which occurred before I represented the area was another senseless killing of an unarmed black male. The officers involved in that shooting received no prison sentences and three of them were allowed to resign with full benefits. The killings of Amadou Diallo, Danroy Henry, and Ramarly Graham also highlight the risk our minority males face when they are automatically deemed suspicious because of the color of their skin or the clothing they are wearing.

The pattern of shooting unarmed minorities first and asking questions later has occurred all too often with the result being the death of an innocent individual.

As a mother and grandmother it is unconscionable to see how our minority youth are stopped, frisked, beaten, and even murdered due to how they look and dress. Members of the media have made irresponsible statements about Trayvon's hoodie being a reason why he was targeted. His attire shouldn't be a litmus test for suspicion, and media focus should instead be on the quick triggers of those who committed these murders without cause.

It is frightening to know that a cold-blooded killer is free and at large among the public, still in possession of the gun he used to kill young Trayvon. We must recommit ourselves to

pursue justice and police accountability. This fight will grow each day until Trayvon's killer is arrested for murder. A tragedy of this magnitude reaffirms my belief that justice is rarely given, but must be demanded through mobilization and action. I have and will continue to make my voice heard and will work with others who realize our young minority males are being unfairly targeted and killed by those engaging in reckless, often unpunished actions.