



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Martin J. Golden

Deputy Mayor Gibbs, Social Service Commissioners and Local 371 Release Latest Data on Workers Assaulted on the Job

MARTIN J. GOLDEN April 23, 2012

61 NYC Social Service Employees Assaulted in the Line of Duty, Legislation Would Increase Penalties

Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs, Administration for Children's Services Commissioner Ronald Richter, Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Seth Diamond, Human Resources Administration Commissioner Robert Doar, and SSEU Local 371 President Anthony Wells today released the latest data on social service workers assaulted on the job. Last year, 61 employees of the three City agencies were assaulted while performing their job duties, a 10 percent increase from 56 assaults in 2010. This data was released as the state is considering legislation (S 641-B/A 4672-B) which would enhance criminal penalties for assaulting employees of a local social services district or juvenile detention agency while in the performance of their duties. The bill has passed the Senate. Deputy Mayor Gibbs made the announcement at City Hall where she was joined by State Senators Martin Golden, Diane Savino and Assemblymembers Peter Rivera, Rory Lancman and Eric Stevenson.

“The city's social service workers fight on the front line daily to improve the welfare of vulnerable New Yorkers,” said Deputy Mayor Gibbs. “Often at great personal risk, they go into dangerous situations that others would only do with a partner and a weapon. It is time that we showed our respect for their commitment by recognizing an assault on them as no less than an assault on a uniformed and armed employee.”

“I am proud to have sponsored this legislation recently approved by the State Senate that will rightly protect social service workers and juvenile detention agency employees,” said Senator Golden. “I call upon my colleagues in the State Assembly to approve this bill this session so that it can be considered by Governor Cuomo to become New York State law. Ensuring the safety of employees while they are on the job has to be paramount.”

“The current law provides for enhanced criminal assault penalties to protect police officers, firefighters, school employees, transit personnel, nurses, and other service providers, appropriately so,” said Senator Savino. “We think such protection should also be extended to our social services employees.”

“Employees in the social services sector are among the most vulnerable public employees and the service they perform is so vital to New Yorkers,” said Assemblymember Rivera. “The essence of Assembly Bill 4672 parallels other public sector positions, thus there is a historical basis and logical rationale to pass this legislation.”

“ACS staff protect those who cannot protect themselves,” said ACS Commissioner Richter. “When a worker knocks on a family’s door, they never know what they will encounter on the other side. We have to do all we can to keep our workers out of harm’s way,”

“Our frontline staff have extremely tough jobs, each day providing homeless families and individuals with the highest level of service in shelter—and they put their hearts into their work,” said Homeless Services Commissioner Diamond. “It is essential that our employees feel safe in the work place and have legal protections against violence by clients.”

“HRA workers provide essential assistance to people in need and deserve the level of protection provided by a felony charge that would deter members of the public from using physical force to injure, threaten or intimidate them,” said HRA Commissioner Doar. “The enactment of this common-sense legislation would show our valuable staff that the city and state government are doing everything they can to protect them from violence in the work place.”

“New York City social service workers are often faced with intense situations that can unfortunately turn violent. They deserve to have the same protections under the law as other public employees who face similar danger. Safe employees are also better employees, which is good for both the workers and the citizens of New York,” said SSEU Local 371 President Anthony Wells.

New York City releases this data as members of the Assembly are reviewing legislation that would amend the penal law to include protection for employees of social service districts and local juvenile detention agencies. Under the current law, assaulting a social service employee would be elevated from a 3rd degree misdemeanor charge to a Class D nonviolent felony charge.

By standing with Social Service Employees Union Local 371, Deputy Mayor Gibbs and the three Commissioners hope to stress the urgency of this bill to lawmakers and view this is an opportune time to pass worker safety legislation in light of the increased number of assaults on social service employees. The bill, sponsored by Senator Martin Golden and strongly supported by Senator Diane Savino (a former ACS worker and Labor leader), was passed in the Senate in February and is currently stalled in the Assembly's Codes Committee.