



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

## **Senator Flanagan Votes For Protection Of New Yorkers With Special Needs**

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Senator John Flanagan (2nd Senate District) joined with his colleagues in the New York State Senate to pass the Protection of People With Special Needs Act, which reforms and strengthens protections for more than one million state residents with special needs. The legislation (S7400) will enhance the safeguards for children and adults who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect and receive care from New York's human service agencies and programs.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo proposed the legislation which establishes the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs; creates standard definitions for "abuse" and "neglect; strengthens statutes that make abuse of vulnerable or disabled persons a crime; and promotes transparency by requiring non-state

operated and provider agencies to disclose the same records relating to abuse and neglect as state agencies are required to under the Freedom of Information Law.

“I am proud to join my colleagues and Governor Cuomo in enacting this strong and sweeping plan that will help protect the rights of those with special needs. Our most vulnerable citizens deserve our most stringent protections and their families deserve to know that their loved ones are being cared for properly,” stated Senator Flanagan.

“Abuse and neglect are never acceptable, but when it takes place in the facilities established for the care of our most vulnerable citizens, it is all the more deplorable,” Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos said. “The Senate is acting swiftly on Governor Cuomo’s legislation to bring about needed reform and further prevent harm from coming to our residents with special needs.”

Responsibilities for the new Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs would include:

- Ensuring that allegations of abuse and neglect are promptly, fully and effectively investigated, reported and prosecuted;
- Operating a statewide 24-hour hotline staffed by trained personnel to which mandated reporters will be required to report allegations of abuse and neglect;
- Requiring providers to implement corrective action plans to prevent future incidents of abuse and neglect;
- Conducting criminal history background checks for people applying to be an employee, volunteer or consultant at any facilities or provider agencies operated, licensed or certified by OMH, OPWDD, OASAS or OCFS;
- Providing oversight of the human services system, conducting death and abuse investigations, and identifying risks and best practices to promote improved quality of care for people with special needs;
- Developing codes of conduct to which all workers who have regular contact with people with special needs must subscribe; and
- Developing a register that will contain the names of individuals found responsible for egregious or repeated acts of abuse or neglect, and barring such individuals from future employment in the care of people with special needs.

The bill is now awaiting further action from the New York Assembly and then will be sent to Governor Cuomo to be signed into law.