



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Yesterday is Already Too Late

The selfishness we're witnessing in Albany right now has to stop.

You know I've written in this column many times that New York State has made real progress these last three years. Things are far better than they used to be simply because Republicans and Democrats alike are finally working together. Despite the accompanying noise, there's really no magic formula. Legislators with common sense have finally realized that you can't always get everything you want and that most times, the reasonable middle ground also happens to advance the people's

agenda very nicely.

But I'm not "feeling the love" lately.

In June, the New York State Senate passed an historic package of bills agreed to by Governor Cuomo that is of vital importance to women. Among these was a measure to strengthen laws against human-trafficking. Unfortunately, human-trafficking is a hidden scourge that most people don't realize is happening every day in communities throughout New York, even here in our Long Island neighborhoods. I'm not pulling any punches about this because it cannot be ignored any longer. We have to try and wrap our minds around what's happening: there are rapidly growing numbers of young women being held against their will, forced into labor and even sold into the sex trade right here on Long Island. And despite the heroic efforts of local law enforcement to free these women and the care nonprofits provide them afterwards, enough is not being done to stop it.

That's just not acceptable because New York has always lead the nation yet we're failing miserably here. Why? Well, despite their initial praise for this package of laws, the Assembly has refused to pass it thus far. Despite the fact that just last week more than 159 people were arrested and 105 teenage girls were saved in nationwide, human-trafficking stings, despite the fact that New York ranks fourth in the nation for incidences of human trafficking, despite prosecutors who say we're just scratching the surface and that we need better laws – despite all this, the bill has not been taken up in the Assembly.

We're better than this. There is clearly a need for the protections this law would provide and for the weapon it can become in the hands of law enforcement across New York. With it they can better protect the disenfranchised and abused women and children of our society.

The bill is written and ready. The Senate passed it unanimously. The Governor has agreed to sign it once the Assembly passes it. The shame is that the Assembly didn't take it up before the end of the legislative session and probably won't before returning to Albany in January. Again, we're better than this. As we have seen all too painfully on the faces of the women and children freed in the stings, yesterday is already too late.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF HUMAN-TRAFFICKING

- Is the person free to leave the work site?
- Is the person physically, sexually or psychologically abused?
- Does the person have a passport or valid I.D. card, and is he/she in possession of such documents? Is someone else holding them?
- Has the person or a family member been threatened?
- Does the person fear that something bad will happen to him or her, or to a family member, if he/she leaves the job?

Visible Indicators:

- Heavy security at the commercial establishment, including barred windows, locked doors, and electronic surveillance.
- Women are never seen leaving the premises unless escorted.
- Victims are kept under surveillance when taken to a doctor, hospital or clinic for treatment. Trafficker may act as a translator.
- High foot traffic, especially for brothels, often by a stream of men arriving and leaving the premises.

Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888 to report a tip.