



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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On Sunday, March 23rd, Senator Bill Perkins joined with NAACP New York Branch President Randy Tucker in honoring the mothers of the "Central Park 5" (Gracie Cuffee, Linda McCray, Milagros Nelson {posthumously}, Sharonne Salaam and Delores "Dee" Wise) at the NAACP New York Branch Phenomenal Women's Award Ceremony. The well attended event took place at St. Luke's AME Church in the presence of a crowd of community supporters and leaders, parishioners, family and friends.

"For over 25 years, you have stood beside your sons— Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana, Kharey Wise and Yusef Salaam—as singular pillars of hope and support in the most incomprehensible moments of inflammatory and exhaustive injustice imaginable," remarked Senator Perkins.

The highly publicized case of the Central Park 5 was centered around five young men who at the time ranged in age between 14 and 16 years old who were wrongfully accused and convicted of the brutal beating and rape of a white female jogger in Central Park in 1989. The young men—Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana and Korey Wise—were merely teenagers who were questioned and coerced for hours on end without legal representation or their parents being present. In addition to the miscarriage of justice that resulted in the wrongful conviction of these young men, their families and even their neighbors were vilified and demonized by the media as well as some public officials and community leaders.

In 2002, the confession of convicted rapist and murderer Matias Reyes, plus DNA evidence confirming his crime, led the Manhattan District Attorney's office to recommend vacating of the convictions of the teenagers originally accused and sentenced to prison. The story of the eventual and total exoneration of the young men, who served full prison sentences, was not nearly as highly publicized as the false accusation of them 13 years earlier.

As the Central Park 5 had their lives snatched from them at such young ages, the impact on their mothers and other family members has been immense and longstanding. However, throughout this 25 year ordeal and even currently as they continue to fight for compensation these noble women have remained strong. Their belief, love and hope for their sons have helped sustain them throughout life and especially throughout this difficult and treacherous battle.

In closing, Senator Perkins said to the mothers, “Each of you have been rocks; rocks of truth, forthrightness and honesty. True profiles in absolute courage. You deserve more admiration, love and respect than we can possibly ever give you.

Attorney Michael Warren praised all of the mothers and urged the community to stand by them and their sons as they continue to pursue justice. He invited everyone to help by attending a rally on Thursday, April 17 at 4:00 PM on the steps of City Hall calling on the Mayor for a "fair and appropriate settlement" for the "Central Park 5".