



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senate Passes Bill to Make Residential Youth Facilities Safer

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"Renee's Law" Helps Protect Staff and Youth in Residential Placements

The New York State Senate today passed a measure to protect the staff and youth in group homes and other youth residential facilities. "Renee's Law" (S2625B), sponsored by Senator Catharine Young (R-I-C, Olean), increases the criminal history and other information available to those involved in residential placements for violent youth offenders so that a thorough evaluation of the youth's rehabilitation and the risk they pose to the community can be performed.

The measure was named for Renee Greco, a 24-year-old youth care worker who was killed at a group home for troubled youths in Lockport, Niagara County.

Senator Young said, "Renee Greco's death was a preventable tragedy, and with today's legislation we are taking steps to ensure the terrible circumstances that led to this tragedy are avoided in the future. Renee will never be forgotten, and in her memory we are working to make sure another innocent employee is not victimized at the hands of violent criminals in state facilities."

Senator George Maziarz (R-C, Newfane) said, “Just over five years ago, Renee Greco was brutally murdered by two violent youths in a state-run group home. This preventable tragedy was spurred by flawed policy decisions within the Office of Children and Family Services and Renee’s Law directly addresses these lax policies. Renee’s killers have been brought to justice but there will forever be a hole in her family and her community. We must not let that fate befall anyone else.”

Ms. Greco was the sole staff member watching six teenage boys in the facility licensed by the state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). In 2009, Ms. Greco was brutally beaten to death after two teenage residents put a blanket over her head while she was playing cards with other residents in the home. Ms. Greco was not informed of either assailant’s prior violent crimes or actions within facilities.

Currently, staff in OCFS-operated or certified programs do not receive background information on the youth in their care. Further, voluntary agencies lack adequate training and staff to receive youth that are dangerous. These practices - based on hopes of rehabilitating misguided youth - have also contributed to a high recidivism rate, increased violence towards staff, and an unknown number of tragedies within the communities where juveniles have been placed.

Renee's Law takes a comprehensive approach to help address the potential risks faced by employees and youth residents by ensuring a thorough evaluation of a youth's rehabilitation and the risk they pose to the community. It requires that staff caring for youths within residential programs operated or certified by OCFS have access to the files and records of the youth in their care. The records would also be available to the legal community, including the judge, presentment agency, district attorney, and defense counsel should the youth commit another crime while in a facility. Upon placement or movement to a lower level of custody, the local law enforcement agency would also receive a youth's

records.

The bill also directs OCFS to establish requirements for training that must be provided to staff responsible for the care and custody of youths placed in or committed to an OCFS program. Topics would include staff abuse prevention and identification; the use of physical intervention; techniques of group and individual child management; gang awareness; absent without leave procedures; conflict resolution; and the laws, rules, and regulations governing the protection of staff from abuse.

The bill has been sent to the Assembly.

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