



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## **Ritchie Seeks Tougher Abuse Law in Wake of Amish Abductions**

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### **Bill Seeks to Close Gaps in State Law So Abusers Can't Go Free**

Inspired by the case of the St. Lawrence County sisters who were abducted from their family's Amish roadside stand, Senator Patty Ritchie has written and introduced legislation that proposes to toughen New York's laws against the sexual abuse of children, with longer prison terms and new restrictions to prevent offenders from hiding their crimes in their future.

Senator Ritchie's bill, S.5560, creates the specific crime of "Sexual Exploitation of a Child," a Class B felony, defined as participating, arranging or assisting in creation of child pornography, including enticing or transporting the victims to be used in such a production.

Abusers would face up to 25 years in prison for each offense. Under current law, promotion or possession of child pornography can result in a sentence of as little as seven years in prison, or even probation. In addition to longer prison terms, the bill also would make it tougher for convicted abusers to legally change their names in an effort to hide their criminal past, and bars abusers from working as school bus drivers after release from prison.

“There are few crimes more deplorable than the abuse of innocent children, and the residents of this community were reminded of that with the horrible actions of the past few months involving sisters who were abducted from right in front of their family home,” Senator Ritchie said.

“Our criminal laws must protect the most vulnerable among us, especially children, and punish those who seek to exploit their innocence. The tougher sentences and other provisions of this bill will force these would-be monsters to think twice, and if it saves even one child from becoming a victim, it is worth the effort.”

In the case of the two St. Lawrence County sisters, abusers Stephen Howells and Nicole Vaisey have admitted that the kidnapping and abuse, and that involving some four other children, were part of a child pornography scheme.

The abusers were charged under tougher federal laws, and now face hundreds of years behind bars. Senator Ritchie’s bill would give state prosecutors additional tools when federal child abuse laws might not properly fit the circumstances of the crime.