



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Martin J. Golden

State Senators Klein, Savino, Golden, Peralta & Addabbo Give Communities a Say in Social Service Providers Coming to Town

MARTIN J. GOLDEN May 27, 2015

Albany, NY — State Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) today empowered neighborhoods across the five boroughs by passing legislation (S.4542a) compelling social service providers, like homeless shelters, to provide notification to local community boards and the City Planning Commission and requiring the CPC to hold hearings to gather local input. The CPC would rule on the siting of the facility.

The bill, co-sponsored by Senators Diane Savino (D- Staten Island/Brooklyn), Marty Golden (R-C-I/Brooklyn), Jose Peralta (D-Queens) and Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens), responds to widespread outrage over lack of adequate notification when a social service provider suddenly moves into a neighborhood without any say from local community boards, associations or groups.

“I know constituents in my community in the Bronx are fed up with being a dumping ground for shelters due to a lack of foresight and planning for this population. Usually, communities are surprised when shelters or other social service facilities pop up in the neighborhood and this lack of transparency needs to end. Communities deserve notification and to have a say in what’s happening in the neighborhoods they care about,” said Senator Klein.

The legislation requires a social service provider to file notice with the CPC and the local community board within 45 to 90 days of selecting a location or file notice at the request of the community board within the same time frame if the social service provider plans to renew its lease. The CPC will hold a public forum considering a resolution issued by the local community board and hear testimony from local residents and groups. The CPC will have 60 to 90 days to approve, modify or deny the application of the provider.

In the 34th State Senate District, which Senator Klein represents, the Capri Whitestone Motel was transformed into the Crystal Family Residence in September 2014 as a “temporary family shelter” without community notification. In March 2015, the city renewed its contract.

In Wakefield, a major site of concern for the community is Project Renewal, a men’s shelter, where an ex-resident tragically gunned down its director, Anna Charle, last month. Over 400 calls to 911 have been made from the immediate area. The site remains open without any community input.

“The City cannot move shelters into communities without notifying anyone. It breeds distrust and a lingering feeling that the community’s opinion doesn’t count. This bill addresses a major concern across the city and will finally allow residents to speak up and be heard when a homeless shelter or other social service facility moves next door,” said Senator Savino.

“This legislation will rightly guarantee community review prior to the creation of supportive housing or social service centers. It is important that neighbors are notified so to bring concerns to the attention of the managing agency before a project advances. I believe this legislation will also bridge the gap and foster a dialogue, between community and social service providers, from the the program’s inception and over time during periods of renewal,” said Senator Golden.

“This common sense legislation would inform a community when the City intends to open homeless shelters and other social facilities within its neighborhoods,” said Senator Peralta. “The proposal that passed in the Senate would prevent future surprises when, from one day to the next, a community wakes up to find a social services facility in its backyard. This is in response to recent incidents, for example, housing at the Westway Motel in my own district. Social service facilities are a critical part of our society, but the community should know about them and has the right to offer its input and concerns.”

“This legislation, while not avoiding or ignoring the crisis of homelessness, substance abuse, or other serious social ills in our society, does provide a necessary means for community members to be fully involved from the get-go when homeless shelters or other social service facilities are planned for their neighborhoods,” said Senator Addabbo, Jr. “All too often, communities are finding that facilities are being virtually rammed down their throats, with no real thought given to whether the buildings are appropriate for the programs, whether the neighborhoods have adequate transit or other services, or whether the proposed operators have questionable track records that should be challenged. We need transparency, honesty and in-depth community conversations about these programs – before they happen, not after the fact.”

The passage of the bill was hailed by community groups.

“It’s about time that we have this type of community review process. Our small neighborhood of 65 families was blindsided by a 95-family homeless shelter and we feel that the economic growth of this community has suffered significantly from not playing a part in the siting process. Ferry Point is not a suitable choice for a shelter because it lacks the necessary supports, transportation and infrastructure to help individuals and families get back on their feet. The Friends of Ferry Point Park support this bill and look forward to it being signed into law,” said Dorothea Poggi, President of the Friends of Ferry Point Park in

the Bronx.

“This legislation is critical for protecting our communities. The Project Renewal Shelter on Bronx Boulevard is a blight on our community — draining police resources and serving as a threat to our safety. This facility was dropped into our neighborhood with no community input whatsoever. That’s unacceptable. I thank Senator Klein for his efforts to reform the shelter siting process and I look forward to this important piece of legislation becoming law,” said Jeremy Skehan of the President of the Webster Avenue Taxpayers Association.

“Our community would like to thank Senator Klein and the other Senators for passing legislation as important as this. Now the Community Board's and Civic Associations will have the opportunity to vet the operators and the facilities before they relocate into our communities. Through public forums we can identify which social services will best fit our neighborhood,” said John Marano, First Vice Chair of Community Board 10.

“It’s a sad and unfortunate fact that community input is often an afterthought when a supportive housing facility opens in a particular neighborhood. This does a tremendous disservice to the community, where lifelong members can often troubleshoot situations before they become major issues. It also leaves the providers vulnerable to rumor campaigns and false allegations about the services they provide. Senator Klein’s bill goes a long way to provide a transparent framework where stakeholders and providers can come together to share information and I hope it one day becomes law,” said John Doyle, Corresponding Secretary of the City Island Civic Association.

“Community Board 1 welcomes this legislation which requires notification to the community prior to more social service programs being placed in neighborhoods that are already over-saturated with these programs. Certain neighborhoods on the North Shore are reaching maximum capacity and the introduction of more programs can tip the balance affecting the

quality of life in a struggling community,” said Priscilla Marco, Chair, Community Board 1 on Staten Island.

“Transparency in the siting of homeless shelters is a necessity if they are to coexist in communities. The passage of bill S.4542a will help facilitate the process by giving the surrounding communities a voice,” said Lucille Hartmann, District Manager of Community Board 1 in Queens.

“Critical to ensuring the success of a homeless shelter in any neighborhood is to ensure the community is not ignored in the siting process, ensuring there is full transparency and open and honest dialogue at the very beginning of, and throughout the process,” said Dawn Scala of the Glendale Middle Village Coalition in Queens.

The bill awaits passage by the Assembly.