



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Crack Down on Sex Offenders

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April is National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. The goal is to raise public awareness about sexual violence, focusing on sexual assault and rape, while at the same time, educating communities and individuals about how to prevent such horrific acts.

The statistics are extremely disturbing. Every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, another person is sexually assaulted. But the story connected to sexual assault is so much more than numbers on a page. Over the years I have heard personal stories from

many victims. The first-hand account can be both shocking and heart wrenching.

No one should ever have to endure the pain and suffering that accompanies sexual assault. Whether at the hands of a stranger, or worse yet, a trusted family member, the physical and emotional scars never heal. Sex offenders prey on those who can't defend themselves, many times targeting vulnerable children.

To put an end to these horrific crimes, police, prosecutors and legislators must all work as a team. By joining together, we can send a clear message to sex offenders, and let them know that their days are numbered. To that end, I recently introduced comprehensive new legislation aimed at increasing penalties for convicted sex offenders to ensure those who commit such heinous crimes are sentenced appropriately.

Right now within the 51st senate district, a criminal case is pending against a 28 year old man accused of raping a 13 year old girl. What makes this case even more tragic is that the accused is a level two sex offender, who spent less than three years behind bars for previously sexually abusing a 16 year old girl.

The accused is a blatant predator. He takes advantage of his youthful appearance to help lure his victims, even using the nick-name "Harry Potter" from the popular children's movie and book character. We need to make certain that if and when he is convicted again he serves serious prison time and is not just released into the community in a few years to continue preying on young girls.

Under current law, first time sex offenders convicted of a class D felony receive a minimum of sentence of only two years, while repeat offenders receive a minimum of only five years in prison. The current sentencing structure is far too lenient, and in some cases would allow sexual predators out of jail while their victims are still minors. We need to increase penalties

to fit the severity of such violent, life-altering crimes.

The legislation I am sponsoring would increase the penalty for rape, criminal sexual act, or course of sexual conduct against a child in the second degree from class D to class C felonies. By doing so, the prison sentences would effectively double, allowing judges to hand down a maximum sentence of 15 years for first time offenders, and a 25 year maximum for repeat offenders. I am also calling for the penalty for sexual abuse in the second degree to be elevated from a class A misdemeanor to a class E felony.

This is not the first time I have sought stronger laws to protect children and other vulnerable individuals from sexual predators. In the past I have supported numerous measures to update laws and close loopholes to allow detection and prosecution of child predators. I am also continuing the fight on other fronts, co-sponsoring current legislation which would create the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention Act, to give law enforcement the tools to catch predators, especially those who deal in child pornography and use the internet, and create a new crime of sexual exploitation of a child.

We need to make sure sexual offenders are not back on the streets and infesting our communities in only a couple of years. Repeat offenders, especially those who prey on our most vulnerable population, cannot be taken lightly. The legislation I am proposing takes a hard line against such evil criminals and provides some degree of justice.