



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Senate Approves Proposal Co-Sponsored by Addabbo to Combat Vandalism and Theft in Houses of Worship

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR. May 9, 2016

Howard Beach, NY (May 9, 2016) In an effort to protect churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other houses of religious worship from harm, the New York State Senate has approved legislation (S.1104) co-sponsored by Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. to increase penalties for criminals who vandalize or steal sacred property from these venerable spiritual institutions.

“Purposefully damaging houses of worship and stealing religious items would probably be considered ‘sinful’ acts by most people,” said Addabbo, with past incidents in his district in mind. “But when the potential spiritual consequences of this behavior don’t serve to prevent it, maybe it’s time to fight back with an increase in New York’s more ‘earthly’ punishments for these deeply disturbing crimes.”

Under the legislation, criminal penalties for vandalism and theft in places of religious worship would rise from misdemeanor levels to felony charges. Religious property that would be better protected under the proposal includes scrolls, vestments, vessels and other items used in connection with religious worship, regardless of their estimated financial value.

“Some religious properties or objects are simply and undeniably priceless in their spiritual significance,” Addabbo noted. “Sadly, if they are stolen or badly damaged, they cannot be replaced and are lost forever. Hopefully, this legislation will help to prevent this kind of devastating loss for people of faith throughout our communities.”

Noting the importance and contributions of spiritual institutions in his district and throughout the state, Addabbo pointed out that “Houses of religious worship are integral parts of our communities, providing people of all backgrounds with places to pray, reflect, come together, support one another and be part of something bigger than themselves. That’s why crimes against our churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and other places built upon spiritual faith are particularly distressing to our communities.”

Addabbo pointed out that houses of religious worship often attempt to remain open for many hours a day in order to serve the spiritual needs of their members and their community at large.

“This responsiveness to the community – which is welcome, needed and a vital part of their mission – can also serve to make these institutions vulnerable to crime,” said Addabbo. “With this legislation, we can take a big step to help goodness triumph over the evil of theft and destructiveness.”

Having passed the Senate, the bill has been referred to the Assembly Codes Committee for review.