



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## SERINO AND CHILDREN'S HOME CALL ATTENTION TO SEX TRAFFICKING PROBLEM

SUSAN SERINO November 15, 2019



**Senator Serino is pictured above at the event alongside a representative from the Hyde Park Police Department, event presenters David Garcia and Lori Stella, as well as Walter Joseph and Erin Cafarelli from the Children's Home of Poughkeepsie.**

HYDE PARK, NY –Senator Sue Serino and the Children’s Home of Poughkeepsie recently came together to host an informational forum regarding Human Sex Trafficking with an emphasis on how to keep kids safe on and offline at the Henry A. Wallace Center at the FDR Presidential Library and Museum. Lori Stella, Program Director of the Safe Harbour Program at the Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, and David Garcia, the Coordinator of the Dutchess County Task Force Against Human Trafficking were lead presenters at the event.

“Sex trafficking is not just a big city issue, and it’s an important discussion to have here in the Hudson Valley to raise awareness and provide residents with important resources,” said Senator Sue Serino. “With our youth spending so much time behind a screen, it is important to be aware of the risks the online world presents and educate ourselves on warning signs so we can better protect ourselves and our kids. I cannot thank the Children’s Home of Poughkeepsie enough for partnering with us on this event and for all that they do to provide a safe environment for so many.”

In 2008, New York State enacted the Safe Harbour, NY program that creates a more systematic approach to children who have been sexually exploited or trafficked. Since its founding, more than twenty-nine counties have received funding for their own safe harbor initiatives, including Dutchess and Putnam Counties.

“I am grateful to have had the opportunity to share and educate our local community on a topic that affects individuals from all walks of life, in any community, including right here in the Hudson Valley. It is important to me, and the Children’s Home, that we bring awareness to this human rights issue that is affecting more and more children every single day. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment, and I have dedicated my work to ensuring that each day,” said Lori Stella, LCSW-R, Program Director of the Safe Harbour Program at the Children’s Home of Poughkeepsie.

“Thank you to Senator Serino’s office for collaborating with the Children’s Home to bring awareness to our local community about the importance of keeping our kids safe, in any environment, from risks of exploitation and abuse. We are proud of the work we are doing with youth and feel fortunate to carry on our mission of working to improve lives and empower children and their families right here in the Hudson Valley,” said Walter Joseph, Executive Director of the Children’s Home of Poughkeepsie.

“While not immune to threat of human trafficking, Dutchess County, under the guidance of County Executive Marc Molinaro, remains vigilant and proactive to raise awareness about the issue and protect our youth – a critical responsibility our county proudly undertakes, said Dutchess County Department of Community and Family Services Human Trafficking Coordinator David Garcia. Since its inception in 2014, the Dutchess County Task Force Against Human Trafficking has heightened awareness in the community and responded to the issue of individuals trafficked within our county. We thank Senator Serino for her continued support on behalf of the children of New York State, and we look forward to similar collaborations to safeguard our most vulnerable residents.”

New York State ranks one of the worst states for Human Trafficking along with California, Texas, and Florida in the United States. Following a NY Post exposé regarding the scourge of sex trafficking here in New York. Senator Sue Serino introduced two pieces of legislation in 2018 aimed at increasing awareness and holding perpetrators accountable. Since that time, she has been working with community organizations and advocates to help raise the profile of this important issue here in the local community.

The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie is a 172-year old organization serving children in the foster care system. The Children's Home is driven by their mission to provide a safe and nurturing environment that improves lives and empowers at-risk children and families in the Hudson Valley and surrounding communities. To learn more about the Children's Home

of Poughkeepsie and the important work that they do, please visit [childrenshome.us](http://childrenshome.us).

The Dutchess County Task Force against Human Trafficking is a multidisciplinary group of professionals and community members whose mission is to prevent human trafficking by working collaboratively to raise knowledge and awareness in our county, to identify potential victims and to provide comprehensive trauma informed services.

To learn more about the Safe Harbour Program in Putnam County, please visit [www.putnamcac.org](http://www.putnamcac.org).

If you, or someone you know, is a victim, please call the Center for Victims Safety and Support 24/7 Hotline at 845-452-7272.

Senator Serino continued, "I want to send a special thanks to the Hyde Park Police Department, whose representatives were on hand to help us 'Shed the Meds' throughout the event!"

The officers on site collected unused and expired prescription drugs from residents and the Police Department will safely dispose of them in an effort to help keep them off our streets.