

News from Senator Catharine M. Young

57th Senate District

Representing Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, and portions of Livingston County



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STATEMENT FROM SENATOR CATHARINE YOUNG ON ANDREW GOLDSTEIN AND KENDRA'S LAW

“Andrew Goldstein, who murdered Fredonia native Kendra Webdale and spurred the passage of Kendra’s Law, has been discharged from prison after serving 19 years of his 23-year sentence. His release is a reminder of the bright life he took on January 3, 1999 when, in the grip of a psychotic episode, he pushed Ms. Webdale into the path of an oncoming New York City subway train. While his incarceration comes to a close, there will never be an end to the loss Kendra’s family lives with every day.

When I learned of Mr. Goldstein’s impending release, I reached out to the Department of Corrections to express my concern for public safety and urge state oversight. I was reassured to learn he has not been discharged into the community but moved to a state facility where he will receive the attention that he needs.

Yet, these developments have placed renewed focus on New York’s landmark Kendra’s Law, which was adopted in the wake of Andrew Goldstein’s horrific actions. His assault on Kendra Webdale was precipitated by his untreated schizophrenia and not an isolated incident. It was preceded by several episodes of violence towards health care workers and others in the months and years prior. The mental health system failed him and it cruelly failed Kendra Webdale.

Yet, in spotlighting the public safety threats of untreated, serious mental illness, this tragedy drove needed change. It set the stage for the passage of Kendra’s Law, a groundbreaking initiative that established a process for court-ordered assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) for acutely mentally ill individuals. Nearly two decades after its passage, it has proven to be an effective and humane tool, with volumes of research that support its positive impact on patients, their families and the public. The \$25 million program cost is more than offset by savings that result from fewer hospitalizations and lower incarceration rates.

However, it remains a temporary law and one that is sorely underutilized. In New York City alone, about 40 percent of the seriously mentally ill population does not receive any treatment, which is heartbreaking. For several years I have sponsored the Kendra’s Law Improvement Act which would make the law permanent and strengthen it through several provisions aimed at closing gaps in the system that prevent its wider usage. The bill has passed the Senate repeatedly with bipartisan support, only to die in the Assembly.

Nearly twenty years have passed since New York State showed real leadership in helping the seriously mentally ill and protecting the public by passing Kendra's Law. I urge the Governor and Assembly leadership to do the right thing once again by making this critical law a priority in the 2019 Legislative Session. We owe it to people suffering from the ravages of mental illness and we owe it to New Yorkers."

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