



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lea Webb

## Senator Lea Webb, Assemblymember Karines Reyes, And Advocates Celebrate The Signing Of The BIPOC Task Force Bill

LEA WEBB January 31, 2024

| ISSUE: **MISSING PERSONS**



ALBANY, NY - On Wednesday, Senator Lea Webb (SD-52), Assemblymember Karines Reyes, colleagues, and advocates held a press conference on the Million Dollar Staircase in the New York State Capitol to celebrate the signing of the BIPOC Taskforce bill (S4266-a/A5088-A) into law. Speakers applauded Governor Hochul, who has tended toward vetoes on taskforce legislations, for signing this public safety legislation and taking important steps toward addressing the epidemic of missing and murdered BIPOC women and girls in New

York.

**Senator Lea Webb, NYS Senate Women's Issues Chair, said,** "This landmark law is a huge milestone for the safety and security of BIPOC women and girls across our state. Each year, an alarming number of women & girls of color go missing or are murdered. No family should ever have to deal with these traumatic experiences. Every community deserves equitable resources and it is crucial that we do a better job as a state to ensure justice for them. I want to thank Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins for her support and Governor Hochul for recognizing the need to address this important issue and signing our bill. I also want to thank my partner, Assemblywoman Karines Reyes for her leadership, all of our legislative colleagues and advocates, and Dawn Rowe, President of Girl Vow, for her tireless efforts on behalf of the families of far too many missing women and girls."

**Assemblymember Karines Reyes,** "I applaud Governor Hochul for her leadership and courage in signing this bill into law. Women and girls of color face a systemic disregard of their cases when they go missing, from law enforcement's delayed response in addressing these cases and the media's disinterest in promoting the fact that they are missing. This new law will establish a task force to fully understand the gaps that exist in our state's response in these cases, allow us to understand best practices and ensure that more of these cases are resolved. If followed through, we can return more women and girls of color to their families and provide them with closure. I am thankful for the partnership of Senator Webb on getting this bill passed into law, former Senator Alessandra Biaggi for first entrusting me with this bill in the Assembly in 2021, and most importantly for the advocacy of Dawn Rowe and Girl Vow for highlighting this critically important issue. Together, we will bring back our girls."

**Dawn Rowe, Girl Vow, Inc., President & CEO,** "Today is a historic moment for BIPOC women and girls whose stories and lives have been pushed into the shadows. This legislation will remedy the structural harms missing women and girls who are Black, Indigenous, and of

color have faced for far too long. From this day forward, we work to shatter the barriers until you have visibility.”

**Said Senator Roxanne J. Persaud,** "Due to the effects of systemic racism, missing BIPOC women have been ignored, understudied, and underreported for years, even as cases continue to rise. It is past due for a unique task force jointly within the Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence to bring attention to the matter. I'm proud to have supported this legislation with my colleagues. Thank you to Senator Webb for introducing this bill and her continued advocacy on the topic, as well as Governor Kathy Hochul for recognizing the dire nature of the crisis and signing the bill into law."

**Senator Cordell Cleare,** "As a longtime supporter and co-sponsor of the Missing BIPOC Women & Girls Taskforce Legislation, I congratulate Senator Lea Webb for carrying this crucial proposal to the point of enactment into law. I sincerely hope that the Task Force springs into immediate action and works to provide equity, compassion and justice to our young women of color who will be marginalized no longer!"

**Said Senator Nathalia Fernandez,** "Establishing the BIPOC Missing Women & Girls Taskforce reflects a crucial step towards addressing the systemic neglect faced by women and girls of color when they go missing. This initiative acknowledges the stark disparity in response between BIPOC individuals and their white counterparts, ensuring that no woman or girl slips through the cracks of indifference. By prioritizing the safety and protection of BIPOC women and girls, we affirm our collective responsibility to challenge and change the narratives of neglect and indifference. Together, we will ensure that BIPOC women and girls are no longer overlooked, but instead made a priority in our efforts to safeguard their well-being and rights."

**Assemblymember Sarah Clark**, “Across New York, cases of missing BIPOC women and girls are frequently treated with less urgency, care, and attention than other cases. These cases are often classified as runaways, further reducing the tools and resources available to find them, while families suffer. Last fall, the body of a 16 year old girl was discovered in a Rochester industrial park, with investigators calling her death a homicide. She had disappeared nearly two months earlier, and despite her phone and social media accounts remaining inactive, her case was classified as a runaway. How would this case have ended if different resources had been dedicated to finding her? There are dozens more open cases of missing youth in our community, whose lives may depend on an immediate and more thorough response. It is clear that our current system is deeply flawed, and it must be thoroughly examined and changed to equitably serve all New Yorkers.”

**Said Assemblymember Kimberly Jean-Pierre**, “This important legislation is the first step towards addressing the disparities in the treatment of missing women and girls of color in New York State. The next step is to generate actionable recommendations that will ensure that missing BIPOC women and girls have greater resources allocated to their cases and all cases are handled equitably. For this reason, I stand strong as a co-sponsor of this legislation and thankful for the prime sponsors and advocates for their leadership on this issue. This is a national crisis and New York needs to lead the way in protecting ALL women!”

**Senator Hoylman-Sigal said**, “Every year a disturbing number of BIPOC women, girls, and transgender youth of color go missing but their cases too often get ignored or receive an incomplete investigation. That ends now. The BIPOC Taskforce bill will ensure that when BIPOC women, girls, and transgender young people do go missing their cases will not be forgotten about. I want to extend my sincere thanks and congratulations to Senator Webb and Assembly Member Reyes for their dedication to passing this bill, which I proudly Co-Sponsored, and to Governor Hochul for signing it into law. Your hard work will create an

important step for providing equal justice to our most marginalized communities and make New York a safer place for all.”

**Background:**

Senator Lea Webb and Assemblymember Karines Reyes secured \$750,000 in the 2024 FY NYS Budget to fund the NYS BIPOC Task Force (S4266A Webb/A5088A Reyes). The bill passed unanimously through both houses of the legislature. It was signed into law by Governor Hochul in December of 2023.

Webb and Reyes’ legislation creates a nine-person state panel to address the epidemic of missing and murdered Black, Indigenous, and Women and Girls of Color and to make sure that when they go missing or are murdered that their cases are treated with the care and concern that they and their families deserve. Additionally, the NYS BIPOC Task Force would be charged with developing policies to increase community education and to identify hubs where abductions are more likely to occur.

A staggering number of women and girls go missing or are murdered every year in the US. The statistics are disproportionately worse for the BIPOC community nationwide and here in New York. Of the more than 250,000 women and girls reported missing across the country in 2020, 40% were BIPOC, with Black women and girls making up 30% of those numbers, according to data from the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). These statistics are even more concerning when you take into account that Black people comprise just 12% of the U.S. population.

Compounding the proportional disparity in the number of disappearances impacting the BIPOC community, is the fact that their cases receive far less media attention and resources. A recent study published in the Columbia Journalism Review examined thousands of news articles related to missing people and found that a missing white woman would be covered

by more than 120 stories in the media. By contrast, a missing Latinx woman would garner an average of 8 stories in the press.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### 2023-S4266A

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- Introduced
  
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
  
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
  
- - Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
  
- Delivered to Governor
  
- Signed By Governor
  
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Establishes a task force on missing women and girls who are black, indigenous and people of color

February 07, 2023

Signed by Governor

Sponsored by [Lea Webb](#)

Do you support this bill?