



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Hinchey, Cunningham Lead Bipartisan Coalition Calling for Passage of Melanie's Law

MICHELLE HINCHEY February 28, 2024



Senators Hinchey, Rolison, Assemblymembers Cunningham and Beephan Welcome Cheryl Chianese to the State Capitol, Advocate for Melanie's Law

**ALBANY, NY** – Senator Michelle Hinchey and Assemblyman Brian A. Cunningham, the sponsors of Melanie's Law ([S6288/A6026](#)), led a press conference in Albany today calling for the bill's passage in the 2024 legislative session alongside Co-Prime Sponsors Senator Rob Rolison and Assemblyman Anil Beephan. Melanie's Law would allow courts to issue orders of protection for immediate family or household members of domestic violence victims,

regardless of their age.

The impetus for Melanie's Law stems from the tragic murder of 29-year-old Melanie Chianese, a young mother from Dutchess County who was killed by an abusive former partner of her mother. The perpetrator had a history of domestic violence offenses, and while an order of protection was granted to prevent contact with Melanie's mother, Melanie was denied protection as she was not a minor. This gap in criminal procedure law prevents close family members of those receiving a protective order from securing their own protection, which Melanie's Law would fix by expanding the scope of coverage. The Senate passed Melanie's Law unanimously in 2023. The bill needs approval from both houses of the State Legislature in the 2024 session and the Governor's signature to become law.

Lawmakers were joined at the State Capitol on Wednesday by a coalition of Melanie's Law supporters, including Melanie's mother, Cheryl Chianese, Dutchess County Executive Sue Serino, Dutchess County District Attorney Anthony Parisi, Chief Assistant DA Michael Brady, Chief Investigator Jeffrey Wright, Family Services CEO Leah Feldman, and members of the Dutchess County Legislature, including Chairman Will Truitt, Assistant Majority Leader Michael Polasek, County Legislator Chris Drago (District 19), County Legislator Robert Faust (District 15), County Legislator Lynne Versaci (District 14), County Legislator Chris Rolison (District 23), County Legislator Ryan Travelpiece (District 2), County Legislator Tony D'Aquanni (District 5), and County Legislator Bob Gorman (District 1).

**Senator Michelle Hinchey said,** "Domestic violence has tragic and wide-reaching impacts on an entire family, and when victims and their loved ones come forward for help, they deserve to be protected under the law. Melanie's Law will finally correct a glaring loophole by expanding orders of protection to include *all* family and household members, ensuring they,

too, can receive a protective order against dangerous individuals. I'm proud to sponsor this common-sense legislation developed in Melanie's memory and championed by her courageous mother, Cheryl, and know that we must pass Melanie's Law in both the Senate and Assembly this year."

"Domestic violence touches people of all identities and backgrounds. This includes not only the direct targets of violence but often their loved ones as well," **said Assemblyman Brian A. Cunningham.** "The tragic death of Melanie Chianese is a stark reminder of the far-reaching consequences of domestic violence and the work that remains to be done to keep our communities safe. I am grateful to have Assemblyman Beephan, Senator Hinchey, and Senator Rolison as partners in this effort. This life-saving, commonsense legislation is a testament to the power of bipartisan action. I am also eternally grateful to Cheryl Chianese, Melanie's mom, for her tireless advocacy in the face of such tragedy."

**Senator Rob Rolison said,** "This vital public safety legislation has strong bipartisan support and passed the Senate unanimously in 2023. Now, we're calling on our colleagues in the state legislature to finish the job, deliver justice for the Chianese family, and protect all New Yorkers from domestic violence predators. By working together, we can make Melanie's Law a reality and close a dangerous loophole once and for all."

**Assemblyman Anil Beephan said,** "I proudly stand with a bipartisan delegation in supporting Melanie's Law. I urge the State Assembly to swiftly pass this bill, echoing the Senate's support from last year. Let's enact this common-sense change, ensuring our domestic violence victims access the protections they rightfully deserve. Thank you to AM Cunningham, Senators Hinchey & Rolison for their leadership."

**Dutchess County Executive Sue Serino said,**

“Due to a dangerous loophole in our justice system, Melanie’s life was tragically taken from her too soon. It has been a long fight to get ‘Melanie’s Law’ passed, but her mother, Cheryl, has been relentless in her efforts to prevent this tragedy from happening again. Turning tragedy into advocacy, this law will save lives and I can’t thank Senators Hinchey and Rolison and Assemblymen Cunningham and Beephan for their efforts to get this bill signed into law.”

**Dutchess County District Attorney Anthony Parisi said,** “The effects of domestic abuse are devastating and far-reaching. We need to make public safety a priority and protect against senseless acts of violence. The enactment of Melanie’s Law would be a huge leap forward to ensuring broader protection from such violence for victims, their families and loved ones. Everyone has the human right to live in safety and free from violence. I implore our lawmakers to pass Melanie’s Law and do our part to bridge the gap in the current law to help prevent future tragedies.”

**Cheryl Chianese said,** “Domestic violence is so much more than physical abuse. The abuser will go to any lengths to make sure their victim receives a lifetime of pain and suffering. Melanie died because of who she was. My daughter. Therefore, regardless of age, each member of the household needs protection from these abusers too.”

**Leah Feldman, Chief Executive Officer of Family Services, said,** “An order of protection is one option that the system can use to protect victims and send the message to offenders that their behavior will not be tolerated. Loopholes, such as the ones that currently exist in the law, disempower victims from seeking safety through the criminal or civil justice system, especially if that safety cannot be extended to their loved ones. We applaud Cheryl, her bravery, and her passion for ensuring that a tragedy, like the one that she and her family

have had to face, does not happen again, in loving memory of Melanie.”

**Michael Polenberg, Director of Government Affairs of Safe Horizon, said,** “We know that intimate partner violence ripples outward, impacting not only the survivor but also their extended family and community. That is why Safe Horizon, the nation's largest nonprofit victim services organization, supports Melanie's Law. This legislation would close the loophole that prevents close family members of those receiving a protective order from being protected themselves. By allowing courts to issue orders of protection for immediate family members or household members of the named victims, regardless of age, we can afford more New Yorkers access to a protective order, a critical tool to many safety plans. We applaud Assembly Member Brian Cunningham and Senator Michelle Hinchey for sponsoring this legislation and urge the Legislature to pass it immediately.”

**Help is available, and you are not alone. Contact the Center for Victim Safety and Support at Family Services:**

- **24-Hour Domestic Violence Hotline:** 845-485-5550
- **Chat Line:** By text: 845-583-0800 | Online: [www.resourceconnect.com/cvss/chat](http://www.resourceconnect.com/cvss/chat)

###