



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Dean Murray

## It's Time to Make “NICK’S LAW” a Priority

DEAN MURRAY June 24, 2024

| ISSUE: **NICK’S LAW**



(East Patchogue, New York) – A hit-and-run accident in Patchogue in March of 2023 that took the life of 25-year-old Nicholas Puzio was the final straw for NYS Senator Dean Murray and NYS Assemblyman Doug Smith. Puzio of Farmingville, New York, died after being struck by, not one, but two separate vehicles, while he was crossing Route 112. The drivers of both vehicles fled the scene after striking Mr. Puzio, leaving him to die. Unfortunately, drivers leaving the scene of accidents have become an all too regular occurrence and have taken far too many lives. For this reason, Senator Murray and Assemblyman Smith introduced “Nick’s

Law” in 2023 (S6051/A6520) which will increase penalties for those convicted of leaving the scene of an accident involving a death.

To add insult to injury, one of the drivers that fled the scene of Mr. Puzio’s accident was recently convicted and sentenced to serve six months behind bars with five years’ probation. The second individual has been indicted and is awaiting trial.

“Two drivers made reckless choices and left my son dying in the street. Who does that? Does anyone have regard for human life? The laws in New York State are far too lenient,” said **Nick’s mother, Terry Puzio**. “Unfortunately, the current punishment doesn’t seem to deter the crime,” she added.

“That is why my colleagues, and I are once again, bringing attention to these senseless incidents,” said **NYS Senator Murray**. “There is little doubt that the state legislature will be called back to Albany in the coming weeks or months to address some unfinished business. We are calling on the Legislative Leaders to make “Nick’s Law” a part of that unfinished business. It seems that deadly hit and run accidents are becoming a regular occurrence on Long Island and it is up to us, as leaders, to do more to stop this horrific trend. Passing “Nick’s Law” will go a long way in doing just that... but we cannot wait until next year, too many lives are at stake. We must act now,” **Senator Murray** added.

“It’s clear that people are afraid of getting in additional trouble for being drunk, impaired or just plain reckless, so they flee the scene, thinking they are somehow escaping serious consequences. By passing Nick’s Law, we will hopefully change that line of thinking. Currently, someone caught fleeing the scene of an accident resulting in death, will be charged with a class D felony, and hit with a fine of no more than \$5,000. Under Nick’s Law, those who flee the scene of an accident resulting death, will be hit with a class B felony and a fine of \$30,000,” stated **Senator Murray**.

It seems that week after week, we are hearing reports of another hit-and-run accident and another person dying. According to multiple news reports, there were as many as 16 hit-and-run accidents involving fatalities in Suffolk County in 2023. This year, to date, there have been multiple hit-and-run accidents resulting in fatalities. The most recent fatality is that of Christopher Hlavaty, a 22-year-old volunteer firefighter in East Patchogue, New York who was killed in a hit and run crash where, once again, the driver fled the scene.

"My hope for the passage of Nick's Law is that people will think twice before leaving the scene of these horrific, life altering accidents. The consequences need to be much stiffer and just maybe, these heartless people will not be so quick to leave our loved ones to die," **said Janine Hlavaty, mother of Christopher Hlavaty.**

"When someone is hurt at the scene of an accident every moment counts in helping to save a life. Nick's law will send a strong message that for anyone who flees an accident scene where there is a loss of life: we will find you and you be locked behind bars for many years. There is no excuse," **said NYS Assemblyman Doug Smith, 5th Assembly District.**

"Everyone should feel safe on the road, whether you are behind the wheel or simply crossing the street. If an accident occurs, everyone involved must also take responsibility and contact emergency services to prevent tragedy. Individuals selfish enough to leave the scene of an accident after hitting a pedestrian need to be punished accordingly—their actions could drastically impact whether the victims of their carelessness get the medical attention they need in a timely manner," **said NYS Assemblyman Ed Flood, 4th Assembly District.**

"How many more young New Yorkers do we have to lose to hit and run and other deadly roadway accidents before the State legislature takes action to improve safety on New York's Streets and highways? Nick's Law, and other bills to increase penalties for reckless driving and those driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol must be made a priority, and I

urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to enact these measures as important steps toward improving the safety of New York's motorist and pedestrians," **said NYS Senator Anthony Palumbo, 1st Senate District.**

"We are deeply concerned about the rising incidents of roadway violence and hit-and-runs. There must be parity between impaired driving homicides and hit-and-runs or drivers will continue to have an incentive to leave. The problem under current law is the driver will face lower charges if they are just caught leaving the scene," said **District Attorney Tierney.**

"Vehicular crimes devastate families and communities, and our statutes must reflect the severity of these offenses. We urgently call for legislative reform to ensure that those responsible are held fully accountable for their actions."

"Leaving the scene of an accident is not only wrong, it is inhumane and it should be dealt with as harshly as possible. When people can face lighter sentences if they are involved in an accident while drunk or on drugs like legal marijuana by leaving an injured person in the road, there is a clear benefit to them to run and hide. That is unacceptable and it must be changed as soon as possible. I applaud Senator Murray and Assemblyman Smith for working together to help make the punishment fit the crime and look forward to working with them to make this law a reality," **said NYS Senator Mario R. Mattera, 2nd Senate District.**

"Keeping families safe remains government's top priority. It's job one. There must be consequences when someone breaks the law. This law provides consequences and helps keep our families safe," **said NYS Senator Jack Martins, 7th Senate District.**

"Hit and run incidents not only inflict unspeakable pain on victims and their loved ones but also undermine public safety and the rule of law. Nick's Law is crucial piece of legislation that serves as a beacon of hope for reducing road fatalities, providing justice for victims, and holding reckless drivers accountable. By addressing the loopholes in current law and

imposing harsher penalties for hit-and-run drivers, we can safeguard our communities, bring justice to victims, and deter reckless behavior," **said NYS Senator Steven Rhoads, 5th Senate District.**

"One-party control in Albany has led to a lack of accountability for criminals, evident in the daily news of brazen crimes committed by those who know they'll likely face minimal consequences. This must change. This legislation is a crucial step toward ensuring that criminals are held accountable for their actions," **said NYS Senator Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick, 9th Senate District.**

"Leaving the scene of an accident is cowardly, and in most cases, the perpetrator is trying to avoid responsibility. Nick's Law will make people think twice about taking off and if they do, the consequences will be severe. Drivers must be held accountable for their actions behind the wheel," **said NYS Assemblyman Joseph DeStefano, 3rd Assembly District.**

"This law tightens up and serves as a warning to anyone who leaves the scene of an accident where summertime is severely injured and death occurs. Respect for law and human life was not considered in the case of Nick, and many others who may have survived had the driver been responsible by reporting the accident and remaining at the scene," **said Assemblywoman Jodi Giglio, 2nd Assembly District.**

"There must be zero tolerance for fleeing the scene of an accident, especially when an individual is gravely injured. This latest tragedy once again highlights the need to pass Nick's Law without delay. Far too many families have been impacted by reckless drivers, and we owe it to them to take action," **said Assemblyman Jarett Gandolfo, 7th Assembly District.**

"When avoidable tragedies happen, there is an expectation of justice. With the introduction of "Nicks Law", a harsher penalty for fatal hit and run crimes will better serve justice to victims to like Nicholas Puzio and families," **said NYS Senator Alexis Weik, 8th Senate District.**