



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

## Senator George Borrello Calls Out Missed Opportunity to Reform Mental Health Laws

GEORGE M. BORRELLO January 9, 2025

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Governor Hochul's Plan Expected to Echo Provisions of Legislation Proposed Three Years Ago  
ALBANY, NY - In the wake of a series of horrific crimes linked to individuals with histories of serious mental illness, Senator George Borrello criticized the failure of state leaders to act on [legislation](#) he introduced in 2022 with former Senator Diane Savino. The proposal aimed to expand the criteria for involuntary commitment and strengthen Kendra's Law—reforms he

argues could have prevented many tragedies and saved countless lives.

"Our state's inaction on addressing serious mental illness has cost many innocent lives in recent years and put countless others at risk," said Sen. Borrello. "While most people with mental illness are not violent, the alarming rise in violent attacks by mentally ill individuals—many targeting unsuspecting victims on New York City subways—shows just how severe this crisis has become. State leaders' refusal to enact commonsense reforms like the bipartisan solution proposed three years ago has had devastating consequences, leaving ordinary New Yorkers to bear the tragic and preventable outcomes of a broken system."

He noted that among the countless crimes that could have been potentially avoided are the following:

**November 2024:** Ramon Rivera, an individual with documented mental health issues and a long criminal history, is accused of a stabbing rampage across Manhattan that resulted in the deaths of three people.

**December 2024:** Kamel Hawkins was charged with attempted murder and assault after allegedly shoving a random stranger onto Manhattan subway tracks, causing severe injuries. Family members said Hawkins displayed signs of mental instability in the weeks leading up to the incident.

**December 2024:** A woman was intentionally set on fire while she was sleeping on a New York City subway train, allegedly by a migrant with substance abuse and mental health issues.

**March 2024:** Franz Jeudy, a criminal recidivist with mental health problems, was accused of sucker-punching a Brooklyn school bus aide in the face as she walked home. The victim lost teeth, suffered facial fractures and a broken jaw, and has lasting nerve damage from the

assault.

**May 2022:** Andrew Abdullah is accused of fatally shooting Daniel Enriquez as he was heading to Sunday brunch on the subway. Abdullah had an extensive criminal history and severe mental health problems.

Sen. Borrello pointed out that, amid this seemingly endless string of crimes, Governor Hochul has announced plans to propose strengthening state laws on involuntary commitment standards and Kendra's Law—proposals that will likely echo reforms Borrello himself introduced years ago.

The legislation, originally introduced by Sen. Diane Savino and Sen. Borrello in 2022 as [S.8508A](#), has been in existence for nearly three years and was most recently [S.5508](#), sponsored by Sen. Scarcella-Spanton, with Sen. Borrello serving as a co-sponsor.

The legislation has two key components that would:

- **broaden the standard for involuntary hospitalization if an individual's mental illness renders them unable to meet their own basic needs** such as food, shelter, clothing, or health care. This is the standard recognized by most other states; and
- **strengthen Kendra's Law by allowing longer hospital stays for people who fail to follow their court-mandated, assisted outpatient treatment (AOT)**. Current law allows for an involuntary, 72-hour hospitalization, a timeframe that is often inadequate to stabilize a patient. In these instances, the bill would allow mental health professionals to request longer hospital stays.

"This legislation is about saving lives and preventing tragedies," said Sen. Borrello. "By broadening the standard for involuntary hospitalization, we can ensure that individuals struggling with severe mental illness receive the care they desperately need before their condition spirals further. Strengthening Kendra's Law is equally critical - allowing longer hospital stays for those who fail to comply with court-mandated treatment ensures that patients have the time and support to stabilize. These reforms are long overdue and will protect not only those suffering from mental illness but also the public from avoidable and often devastating consequences."

Kendra's Law is named in honor of Kendra Webdale of Fredonia, New York, who was tragically killed by a man with a long history of schizophrenia in a subway-shoving incident in New York City in 1999. She was a friend and schoolmate of Sen. Borrello's during their years at Fredonia High School.

"Kendra's Law was spurred by a preventable and horrific tragedy that took the life of a kind, gifted young woman and a friend from my high school days. However, that tragedy gave us an important tool for helping seriously mentally ill people access lifesaving treatment," said Sen. Borrello. "Evidence has shown that is extremely effective in helping prevent homelessness, incarceration, suicide and other harms that are often linked with serious mental illness. However, it is underutilized and deserves to be strengthened. Our bill would address these issues."

"Nearly three years ago, a bipartisan solution was proposed that could have saved lives and provided critical help to those struggling with severe mental illness. Leaving mentally ill individuals to suffer on the streets, consumed by delusions, is neither compassionate nor humane—it is cruel and dangerous. What the governor is advocating for is the concept of the legislation we introduced three years ago. The framework already exists. If Governor Hochul is serious about reforming New York's mental health system, she should include this bill's

language in her executive budget," Sen. Borrello concluded.

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