



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## Cleaning Up Our Neighborhoods

JEFFREY D. KLEIN June 21, 2010

| ISSUE: **CRIME, NEW YORK CITY, JUVENILE CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

### Senate Passes Klein Bill to Deter Graffiti Vandals

State Senator and Deputy Majority Leader Jeffrey D. Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) announced that the NYS Senate passed his legislation last week that would require convicted graffiti vandals who are sentenced to community service have graffiti removal be a part of that service. This legislation (S.1880/NYS Assembly same-as A/8532/Benedetto) is another part of Senator Klein's ongoing efforts to eliminate graffiti across the Bronx by cracking down on those who perpetrate these crimes.

"Graffiti to our homes, businesses and places of worship causes emotional and in many cases financial distress, and is too serious a crime to allow vandals to get away with a slap on the wrist. By enforcing harsher penalties on these crimes, we send a clear message that this behavior will not be tolerated. My constituents and I stand strong and stand together in our call to make graffiti sentences tougher and make sure defendants face the full consequences of their actions," said State Senator and Deputy Majority Leader Jeffrey D. Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester).

Last month, the Senate also passed Klein's bill to would increase criminal penalties for vandalism of houses of worship, including graffiti, arson, and other similar crimes. Klein's bill (S.1909/A.180) would make it a felony in most instances to vandalize or steal from a house of worship or its surrounding property. Klein has participated in a number of graffiti clean-up efforts across his district already this year, including the Love Gospel Church in Van Nest in June, and the Saint Francis Xavier Church in Morris Park in February.

In April of this year, Senator Klein joined more than a dozen Bronx community leaders outside the Bronx Criminal Courthouse to announce the creation of a new Bronx Court Watchers program aimed at showing community support and solidarity in calling for tougher sentences for repeat adult graffiti vandals.

The Court Watcher's first sit-in took place on April 22nd. The idea for the Court Watchers program came from a meeting Klein had in October 2009 with community leaders from the Waterbury LaSalle and Pelham Bay communities. The group discussed enforcing tougher penalties on repeat, adult graffiti vandals by increasing the community's presence in the courtroom when cases were being heard. As part of the Court Watchers program, volunteers from the community will sit in on repeat, adult offender court proceedings, wearing t-shirts and buttons that express their intolerance for graffiti and desire for a jail-time sentence.

According to the Bronx District Attorney's Office, from January 1st to April 1st 2010, seventeen cases were heard in Bronx Criminal Court for either making graffiti or possession of graffiti instruments, all of the defendants were charged as adults. Thirteen of those cases ended in guilty pleas and one defendant received jail-time. In 2009, the Bronx District Attorney's Office reported 97 graffiti cases, with 86 guilty pleas. In 2008, the office reported 109 graffiti cases, 98 pled guilty. The District Attorney's Office also says most graffiti cases do not go to trial and sentences typically range from probation to 60 days in jail. Most graffiti crimes are misdemeanors with a punishment of up to a year in jail.

To participate in the Court Watchers program, 34th Senate District residents may call Senator Klein's office at (718)-822-2049.