



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George D. Maziarz

Renee's Law introduced in Senate

GEORGE D. MAZIARZ June 3, 2011

| ISSUE: **JUVENILE CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

A bill created as a result of the brutal murder of a Lockport group home worker two years ago has been introduced, according to the legislation's co-sponsors Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C – Olean) and Senator George Maziarz (R,C – Newfane).

"Renee's Law," named after Renee Greco, who was only 24-years-old when she was bludgeoned to death while supervising troubled teenagers at a group home, was formally unveiled today with family, friends and community leaders.

"Today, we are taking the first steps to ensure that the avoidable circumstances that led to the death of Renee Greco two years ago will never happen again. Renee should never have been working alone with violent criminals such as Anthony Allen and Robert Thousand. 'Renee's Law' will provide safeguards for both staffers and residents," said Senator Young.

"Renee's Law provides a comprehensive approach to reforming our juvenile justice system. It ensures that relevant information about youthful offenders can be shared by agencies and provides for the unsealing of documents pertaining to juvenile delinquency proceedings," said Maziarz.

Added Lockport Mayor Michael W. Tucker, "This bill establishes clear criteria to assess the risks posed by youthful offender in order to ensure that they are placed properly and that staff is fully informed and properly trained to deal with violent offenders. This is very welcomed legislation."

On June, 8 2009, Renee was the sole supervisor of six males at the Avenue House for troubled youths. Two of the juveniles, 18-year old Allen and 17-year old Thousand, placed a blanket over Renee's head and beat her to death with a wooden table leg while she sat at a table playing cards with other residents.

Senators Young and Maziarz said that while both Thousand and Allen were arrested and later convicted for their roles in Renee's death, the state's current juvenile justice system still failed Renee and others who have been victims of violence.

Mark Sauberan, Renee's uncle, said, "Words cannot express how deeply we miss Renee, her tie-dye shirts, her infectious smile, and her commitment to help others. We pray every day that other families would not have to suffer from losing a loved-one due to the same senseless and disorganized juvenile system. Thanks to the relentless push led by Senator Catharine Young and Senator George Maziarz, reform has brought hope that changes will be implemented to protect innocent lives. Even though we've lost a beautiful young lady in Renee, we are honored her legacy will live on with the enactment of Renee's

Law.”

The Senators blame bad policies, initiated by New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Commissioner Gladys Carrion, which allow violent youths to be released prematurely from heavily supervised facilities into less secure residential homes where they have viciously assaulted community members and attacked staffers.

“Many of the state-operated facilities have been emptied and closed under Commissioner Carrion’s direction. Juveniles are not in the state-operated system long enough anymore to receive the treatment that they need and are pushed into residential homes where staff are not prepared or trained to handle situations when they get out-of-control. There are absolutely no safeguards in place to protect the public. Either this needs to change or Commissioner Carrion needs to go,” said Senator Maziarz.

Along with ensuring that staff receive expanded training such as classes in staff abuse prevention and identification, child abuse and maltreatment prevention, gang awareness, and conflict resolution, “Renee’s Law” also would hold the Commissioner of OCFS personally responsible for ensuring training mandates are met.

Staff also would be mandated to report to local law enforcement a youth’s criminal activity while in their care and would be protected under the state’s whistleblower law to come forward.

The bill requires that a youth’s criminal record be shared with all staff responsible for the care of youth in their custody and with any foster parents of youths placed in their care after the youth is release from OCFS custody.

Local law enforcement also would have access to a youth’s records and a provision in the bill would require OCFS to notify local police departments no less than ten days before a youth is placed within their jurisdiction.

Among the key provisions in the legislation is the establishment of a multi-tiered risk assessment system that requires OCFS to take into account the severity of the youth’s original crime, their behavior while in an OCFS facility, and other mitigating factors prior to the youth being placed into less secure OCFS-run facilities or privately operated residential homes.

Additionally, “Renee’s Law” would require a police officer to accompany an employee of a program, upon request, to an AWOL youth’s home and assist in retrieving such youth.

"This legislation provides both preventive and corrective measures to ensure the safety of mental health care providers and residents alike. The state has a responsibility, when placing employees in potentially dangerous situations, to ensure the workers are aware and prepared for what they may face,” said Assemblywoman Jane Corwin (R,C,I – Clarence). “Renee Greco never should have been put in a situation as dangerous as the one she was placed without her knowledge or an ability to protect herself. Renee’s Law will make sure that never happens again."

"The sensible way to treat offending juveniles is to be completely aware of all the information needed to properly assess the level of security needed for their confinement; access to this information for a secure and safe community is necessary," said Niagara County District Attorney Michael J. Violante.

“In Niagara County, we understand the tragic consequences of Gladys Carrion’s misguided policies all too well,” said Niagara County Legislature Chairman William L. Ross (C,R,I-Wheatfield). “Renee Greco was a dedicated and idealistic social worker who was failed profoundly by an inadequate system—inadequate

staffing levels, inadequate policies, and inadequate concern for the safety of workers trying to reform delinquent youth. By introducing Renee's Law, Sen. Young and Sen. Maziarz are saying, 'Never again.'"

"Renee Greco's death was a tragedy in every sense of the word. She had no chance at all to survive after such a brutal beating," said Niagara County Legislator Wm. Keith McNall (R, C, I, W-Lockport), whose district includes the group home where Greco worked. "I see the crime scene almost every day, as it is in my district—something I will never forget. I commend Sen. Maziarz and Sen. Young for their hard work in introducing this bill to help prevent such a terrible crime from happening again. I am most appreciative, as are many others, for their commitment in addressing the failures at OCFS before they cost another young life."

###