



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Senator Klein Unveils Bill to Protect Community, Law Enforcement, From Dangerous Mentally Ill Individuals

JEFFREY D. KLEIN August 18, 2011

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Measure to Give Law Enforcement Info to Defuse Violent Encounters, Prevent Tragedy

BRONX, N.Y. – Senator Jeffrey D. Klein, (D-Bronx/ Westchester), was joined by Morris Park community leaders to announce important new legislation to protect residents help law enforcement officers defuse potentially dangerous situations with mentally ill individuals.

This change would give law enforcement the information they need to plan for potentially violent encounters with these patients and avoid tragedies like the March 21 incident at 1545 Rhineland Ave. In that incident, a mentally disturbed

man was fatally shot by police after he threatened his roommate and lunged at officers with a knife. The man had a history of mental health-related violence and 16 prior arrests – information that responding officers did not have at the time.

“This type of red tape is literally putting people's lives at risk,” Senator Klein said. “We need to make sure that police have the information they need to better protect themselves, as well as innocent bystanders and even the mentally ill aggressors in these dangerous situations. My common sense legislation will do just that by breaking down bureaucratic barriers, while also respecting the privacy of these individuals.”

The legislation, (S.5871), would require service providers who place mentally ill individuals in residential housing to alert law enforcement agencies if these clients have a history of violence, or are deemed likely to cause physical harm to others. Having this information beforehand will allow police to alter tactics, including employing the use mental health professionals, while responding to a call with a violent, mentally ill individual.

Currently, these providers have no such obligation and have been resistant in sharing this information.

After the Rhinelander Avenue incident, it became clear that services providers have placed multiple clients at the building, which has resulted in many dangerous encounters and complaints from other building residents. As of last week, police have been forced to respond to the building 61 times this year, and have made five arrests of emotionally disturbed people. Last year, 111 calls to 911 were made in reference to 1545 Rhinelander.

"This legislation is sorely needed as this location has been a problem in the community for some years," said Al D'Angelo, President of the Morris Park Community Association. "The safety of our police is paramount, this will help to alleviate the unknowns they face."

This legislation applies to organizations that operate community residences, or place persons with a mental illness or a developmental disability in residential apartment buildings containing 15, or more, units. They would be required to provide written notice to local law enforcement agencies that a resident under their supervision has been certified by a mental health professional as either likely to cause physical harm to other persons, or likely to cause harm to others if he or she ceases to undergo necessary treatments, or therapies.

Assemblywoman Naomi Rivera, (D-Bronx), has agreed to carry this legislation in the the Assembly.

Joe Thompson, 49th Precinct Community Council President, said: "All you need is for bad guys to win is for good guys to do nothing.' This is a case when the good guys did something. The community saw the problem, the 49th Precinct noticed a deficiency in the law and Senator Klein worked with Deputy Inspector Nicholson to introduce new legislation to act on the problem."

Bobby Ruggerio, President of the Morris Park Merchants Alliance, said: "In order for our businesses to thrive a community must be a safe and welcoming place. This legislation will assist us in doing just that."