



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

## Senators Valesky, Klein, Bring Erin Merryn's Law To NY State

DAVID J. VALESKY October 25, 2011

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### *Measure Aimed at Stopping Child Sexual Abuse; Catching Predators*

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Senators David J. Valesky, (D-Oneida), and Jeffrey D. Klein, (D-Bronx/ Westchester), were joined today by nationally recognized anti-abuse advocate and survivor Erin Merryn and others to announce important legislation to stamp out child sexual abuse in New York.

The measure, "Erin Merryn's Law" would require schools to make a change to their existing curriculum for child abduction to include child sex abuse prevention. This alteration would give critically important information to victims – many of whom do not know there is a way out of their horrific situation.

"Sexual abuse of children is among the most heinous of crimes, and as a society we must do whatever we can to prevent it," Senator Valesky said. "By building on existing curricula and providing children with information about ways to get help, we can hopefully reduce the number of children who have to endure a horrible situation, and catch and punish their abusers."

"The only information that many of these victims receive is from their own abusers," Senator Klein said. "We want children to know that there is help and that there are adults who will help them and bring these dangerous sexual predators to justice. I thank Erin for the strength and the tenacity she has shown in her pursuit to have no more children go through what she has endured."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of 18. This means there are more than 42 million adult survivors of child sexual abuse in the U.S. More than 90 percent of sexual abuse victims know their abuser. Half (50 percent) of them are members of the household and 38 percent are acquaintances of the victim, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Erin Merryn was one such victim.

As a child, Merryn was abused by both a neighbor and a family member. She says she stayed silent due to a combination of threats from her abusers, and the lack of knowledge about available help.

"My innocence was killed as a child and my voice silenced., Merryn said. "I was not educated on not keeping secrets if someone was hurting me. My mission, through this legislation, is to educate children on what I never learned. I've turned tragedy into triumph and, while I cannot get back my innocence, I reclaimed my voice. I will not stop until children in all 50 states are protected from sexual abuse."

Merryn broke her silence with the publication of a book, "Stolen Innocence," when she was a senior in high school. Now 26, Merryn has become a nationally recognized anti-abuse advocate, who has spoken in Washington and has been featured on "Oprah," "Good Morning America," and other news programs. She is fighting to get "Erin Merryn's law" passed in all 50 states.

If passed, New York would become the third state to enact Erin Merryn's law, following Missouri and Merryn's home state of Illinois.

"As victim advocates, we want to thank Erin for her courage, vision and leadership in advocating for this essential legislation, and we want to express our appreciation to Senators Klein and Valesky for their commitment. Sexual abuse of children is most often committed by those entrusted with the care and protection of those children, and this legislation will ensure that this critical information reaches every child in New York State." Randi Bregman, Executive Director of Vera House, Inc.

"Erin Merryn's Law recognizes that children themselves need to be not only aware of the dangers that exist in our society but provided with information and support to aid in avoiding abuse, exploitation and abduction," said Marla Behler, New York State Children's Alliance and Program Coordinator of the Putnam County Chapter of the NYS Child Advocacy Centers. "Our thanks and appreciation go out to Erin Merryn and Senators Klein, and Valesky for their hard work in seeing that this very important issue is successfully addressed at the highest levels of government in our state."

"While it is important for parents to discuss child sexual abuse prevention with their children, it is vital to have this subject addressed in schools, as sexual abuse so often takes place in a child's own home," said Jill Starishevsky, author of 'My Body Belongs to Me,' and a New York City-based prosecutor of child abuse and sex crimes.

The costs to alter existing programs will be minimal. According to California-based Community Health Improvement Partners. for every dollar spent of prevention programs, there is a \$2 to \$20 savings in reduced demand for benefits and social programs.