



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Protecting Houses of Worship: Sen. Klein Proposes Tougher Penalties for Crimes on Religious Institutions

JEFFREY D. KLEIN January 29, 2012

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PELHAM BAY, BRONX, N.Y. – Following a rash of break-ins and burglaries targeting houses of worship in the Northern Bronx, State Senator Jeffrey D. Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) today announced legislation to stiffen criminal penalties for those who steal, or damage items and property in churches, synagogues and other religious institutions.

He was joined by religious and community leaders who have been stung by these crimes.

“An assault on a house of worship is an assault on an entire community,” Senator Klein said. “These vandals need to know there will be heavy consequences for their reckless and despicable crimes. This legislation will send that message and protect these sacred institutions.”

This recent crime spree includes:

- In the Waterbury-LaSalle Community, Our Lady of Assumption Roman Catholic Church parishioners noticed a laptop and approximately \$400 were stolen from their school. Additionally, a door leading to the chapel was broken.
- In Pelham Bay, Zoodohos Peghe Greek Orthodox Church was victim to about \$50 being taken from donation box and the destruction of an intricate wood carving in the Church. Additionally, two months prior at St. Theresa Catholic Church their gift shop was broken into and cash was stolen from the register.
- On City Island, Police found windows and doors smashed and broken at Temple Beth El Synagogue and silver Torah crowns and Kiddush cups missing. They estimate \$5,000 to \$10,000 worth of items were stolen.

Senator Klein’s legislation would:

- **Increase** the penalty for theft, or the intentional damage to a scroll, religious vestment, vessel, any other item used in connection with religious worship, in any building of worship punishable, to a maximum of seven years in prison. These crimes would be classified as third-degree grand larceny and second-degree criminal mischief, both Class D Felonies. Currently, these charges would only apply in cases where items worth more than \$3,000 have been stolen, or where items have sustained more than \$1,500 in damages.
- **Expand** the definition of second-degree grand larceny to include the theft of any scroll, religious vestment, vessel, any other item used in connection with religious worship, in any building of worship, that are worth more than \$250. This would be a Class C felony punishable by up to five to 15 years in prison.
- **Strengthen** the penalty for any intentional damage to house of worship-owned property to up to four years in prison, making it a Class E felony. Currently, this applies to damage worth more than \$250.

If passed, this legislation would build upon Senator Klein’s past legislative accomplishment of increased criminal penalties for those who desecrate and vandalize church property. That bill was signed into law by Governor Paterson in 2010 and was strongly championed by a wide range of religious leaders, including Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan.

“A crime against a religious institution is a crime against a community at large,” said Monsignor Anthony Marchitelli of Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church.

“It is urgent that all people of good will stand together against violence that target our houses of worship. We thank Senator Klein and his colleagues for his leadership in helping lift us up so that all of our brothers and sisters of faith can congregate and worship in safety and peace,” said Rabbi Shohama Wiener of Temple Beth El Synagogue.

Those who have any information on these recent burglaries against religious institutions are urged to contact the 45th Precinct Detective Squad at (718) 822-5414 or Crime Stoppers at (800) 577-8447.