



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

IDC Announces Senate Passage of Erin Merryn's Law

JEFFREY D. KLEIN April 30, 2012

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ALBANY, N.Y. – The Independent Democratic Conference was joined today by Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, (D-Bronx), and nationally recognized anti-abuse advocate and survivor Erin Merryn to hail the passage of important legislation to stamp out child sexual abuse in New York.

The legislation, "Erin Merryn's Law," (S.6182 Klein/ A.8993 Dinowitz), would require schools to make a change to their existing curriculum for child abduction to include age appropriate information on 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.

"We want children to know there are adults who will help them and we want these dangerous sexual predators to know that they can no longer use fear and ignorance to mask their repugnant actions," Senator Klein said. "My colleagues and I are proud to join Erin in her mission make sure that no other child has to go through what she has endured."

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 stolen, my trust was taken, but I have reclaimed my voice from the men that threatened and silenced me as I was raped and molested as a child," Merryn said. "I wish someone was educating me on to tell instead of being brainwashed into silence by my abusers. My mission is to empower children in every state to speak up and tell if they are every being groomed or abused by a sexual predator so they do not stay silent the way I did. Through age appropriate curriculum on sexual abuse prevention we can empower children to speak up and tell. Right now they only hear one message and that comes from their abuser threatening them into silence. There are currently 42 million people in America that are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Three million of those are children. That could fill 42 national football stadiums. Join with me in supporting Erin's Law to protect and educate children. Help save the children who are waiting on us to give them a voice as they continue to stay silent."

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. 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.

Merryn broke her silence with the publication of a book, "Stolen Innocence," when she was a senior in high school. Now 27, 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.

This measure has already been made law in Indiana, Missouri and Merryn's home state of Illinois. The bill has passed both houses of the Legislature in Maine and is currently under consideration by that state's governor.

"This legislation will help ensure that more children receive practical and age-appropriate instruction that which they can incorporate into their daily lives," Assemblyman Dinowitz said. "Child abuse and sexual exploitation are scourges on our society, and we must do everything we can to combat their heinous crimes. This legislation is but one step in our efforts to keep our children safe."

"Erin's story is very compelling, and her experience demonstrates the need for additional education and instruction for children so that they can recognize what is appropriate and what isn't, and to hopefully prevent abuse from happening in the first place," said Senator David J. Valesky, (D-Oneida).

The costs to alter existing programs will be minimal.

According to California-based Community Health Improvement Partners, for every dollar spent on prevention programs, there is a \$2 to \$20 savings in reduced demand for benefits and social programs.

In New York, the immediate ripple effects caused by child sexual abuse is estimated to cost more than \$211 million, and a long term impact that is 10 times as large, according to calculations supplied by Darkness to Light, a South Carolina-based organization dedicated to ending child sexual abuse.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHILD ABUSE BY REGION IN NEW YORK STATE

| NY State Region | Counties | Immediate Economic Impact | Long Term Economic Impact |
|-------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Western New York | Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Niagra | \$15,259,558.59 | \$157,173,453.48 |
| Long Island | Suffolk and Nassau | \$30,884,646.14 | \$318,111,855.24 |
| New York City | Bronx, Kings (Brooklyn), Richmond (Staten Island), New York (Manhattan), Queens | \$89,126,935.00 | \$918,007,430.5 |
| Southern Tier | Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Delaware, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins | \$7,172,655.51 | \$73,878,351.76 |
| North Country | Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Lewis, Hamilton, Essex, Clinton, Franklin | \$ 4,722,756.00 | \$48,644,394.18 |
| Central New York | Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego | \$ 8,633,877.37 | \$88,928,936.91 |
| Finger Lakes | Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, Livingston, Ontario, Monroe, Wayne, Seneca, Yates | \$ 13,269,678.14 | \$136,677,684.85 |

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|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mid Hudson Valley | Sullivan, Ulster, Orange, Dutchess, Putnam, Westchester, Rockland | \$24,975,315.76 | \$25,7245.752.33 |
| Mohawk Valley | Oneida, Herkimer, Otsego, Schoharie, Fulton, Montgomery, | \$5,502,373.03 | \$56,674,442.31 |
| Capitol Region | Warren, Washington, Saratoga, Schenectady, Columbia, Rensselaer, Greene, Albany | \$11,765,730.57 | \$121,187,024.87 |
| Totals | New York State | \$211,313,526.11 | \$2,176,529,326.43 |

Immediate impact includes costs associated with medical care, and ambulance services, mental health care, police and fire services, social and victim services, as well as the costs associated with the criminal justice system. Long term economic impact additionally include costs associated by future lack of productivity, and treatments associated with long term poor physical health and high risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse.

A county, by county breakdown on the economic impact of child sexual abuse can be found in the IDC's accompanying white paper on Erin Merryn's Law.

"This abuse is most often committed by those entrusted to care for and protect these children," said Senator Diane Savino, (D-Staten Island/ Brooklyn). "With this legislation aim to protect children and bring abusers to justice by breaking the barriers that allow this abuse to continue with impunity."

"Erin Merryn offers a voice for those who have been victimized while sharing a vision to protect others from facing the horrors of abuse," said Senator David Carlucci, (D-Rockland/ Orange). "New York should join with other states that have already established these common sense guidelines so that we can shield our most vulnerable population and prevent future tragedies from taking place."

Loren Cunningham, Education Director for Syracuse-based Vera House, said: "The often unrecognized crimes of child sexual abuse and exploitation harm thousands of young people in New York State. As an agency that has been providing sexual abuse prevention services for over 20 years, Vera House, Inc. is pleased to know that the New York State Legislature is

trying to ensure that sexual abuse prevention gets the attention it deserves.”

Kathleen M. Murphy, Executive Director of the Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse of Dutchess County, said: “We can no longer stick our heads in the sand. We must recognize that education is necessary in order to combat child sexual abuse. Remember, there is no excuse for child abuse.”

Kerri Raissian, Community Outreach Coordinator for the McMahon/ Ryan Child Advocacy Center, said: “The McMahon/ Ryan Child Advocacy Center believes that child abuse education prevents child abuse because it takes away a predator's ability to keep a child silent. Child abuse prevention is a vital part of children's education, and like any lesson a child learns in school, all of us that care for children must take an active role in ensuring these lessons are reinforced at home and elsewhere. We commend Erin Merryn, the Senators, and Assemblymen who have taken strides to make sure New York's most important constituents, our children, will be empowered to find their voice.”

Karen Hill, Chair of the New York State Children’s Alliance NYSCA , Inc. said: “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. Our thanks and appreciation go out to Erin Merryn for her courage and vision, and Senators Klein, and Valesky, and all the sponsors, for their hard work in seeing that this very important issue is successfully addressed at the highest levels of government in our state.