



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Senate Measure Improves Safety in Residential Youth Facilities

CATHARINE YOUNG June 12, 2013

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*“Renee’s Law” Expands Information Available to Those Involved in the Placement of Violent Youth*

ALBANY – The New York State Senate today passed a measure to protect the staff and occupants in group homes and other youth residential facilities. “Renee’s Law” (S2625), sponsored by Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean), increases the criminal history and other information available to those involved in residential placements for violent youth offenders so that a thorough evaluation of the youth's rehabilitation and the risk they pose to the community can be performed.

“Again, the Senate has passed this bill to avoid another senseless tragedy like Renee Greco’s death. We need a comprehensive approach to reforming the juvenile justice system to ensure the safety of both staff members and residents. No one should be unknowingly placed in a dangerous situation like Renee was. By providing background information on residents and proper training, staff members can better protect themselves and other residents. This is common-sense legislation that should be enacted to save the lives of innocent victims, and I urge the Assembly to pass it,” said Senator Young.

The measure was named for Renee Greco, a 24-year-old youth care worker who was killed at a group home for troubled youths in Lockport, Niagara County. Ms. Greco was the sole staff member watching six teenage boys in the facility licensed by the state Office of Children and

Family Services (OCFS). In 2009, Ms. Greco was brutally beaten to death after two teenage residents put a blanket over her head while she was playing cards with other residents in the home. Ms. Greco was not informed of either assailant's prior violent crimes or actions within facilities.

Currently, staff in OCFS-operated or certified programs do not receive background information on the youths in their care. Further, voluntary agencies lack adequate training and staff to receive youths that are dangerous. These practices, though based on hopes of rehabilitating misguided youth, have contributed to a high recidivism rate, increased violence towards staff, and an unknown number of tragedies within the communities where juveniles have been irresponsibly placed.

Renee's Law takes a comprehensive approach to help address the potential risks faced by employees and youth residents by ensuring a thorough evaluation of a youth's rehabilitation and the risk they pose to the community. It requires that staff caring for youths within residential programs operated or certified by OCFS have access to the files and records of the youth in their care. The records would also be available to the legal community, including the judge, presentment agency, district attorney, and defense counsel should the youth commit another crime while in a facility. Upon placement or movement to a lower level of custody, the local law enforcement agency would also receive a youth's records.

The bill also directs OCFS to establish requirements for training that must be provided to staff responsible for the care and custody of youths placed in or committed to an OCFS program. Topics would include staff abuse prevention and identification; the use of physical intervention; techniques of group and individual child management; gang awareness; absent without leave procedures; conflict resolution; and the laws, rules, and regulations governing the protection of staff from abuse.

The bill has been sent to the Assembly.