Senate Approves Historic Women's Equality Agenda

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SENATE APPROVES **HISTORIC WOMEN'S EQUALITY AGENDA**

Senator Martins Co-Sponsors All Nine Measures

The New York State Senate passed an historic package of bills that would ensure equal pay for women, strengthen laws against human trafficking, provide greater support and protection for victims of domestic violence, further deter sexual harassment, and end discrimination of women in the workplace related to gender, pregnancy, and family status.

For State Senator Jack M. Martins, the legislation hit close to home. Senator Martins, a strong believer in women's rights, and his wife are raising four daughters. "We are able today to provide a better future for my daughters and for yours, for future New Yorkers," he said on the floor of the Senate, speaking in support of the legislation. "Things like this make a difference."

Senator Martins co-sponsored all nine pieces of legislation that comprise the women's equality legislative package.

Legislation passed by the Senate includes bills that:

Ensure Pay Equity - S5872 - This bill will ensure that women receive the wages they are entitled to by prohibiting employers from paying employees disparate amounts due to gender.

Prohibit Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - S5873 - This bill would ensure that all employees are protected from sexual harassment by ensuring that existing protections apply to businesses of all sizes.

Remove Barriers to Remedying Discrimination - S5874 - This legislation would allow successful parties in employment or credit discrimination cases based on sex to recover attorney's fees. Approximately 77 percent of sex-based employment discrimination cases filed with New York State are filed by women.

Prohibit Family Status Discrimination - S5875 - This bill would prohibit employers from denying work or promotions to workers because they have children. Existing law only prohibits discrimination based on familial status in credit and housing, but not employment -- which can have a negative impact on women with children.

Stop Housing Discrimination - S5876 – This bill will protect victims of domestic violence from housing discrimination and establishes a task force to study the impact of a source of income, such as housing vouchers, on access to housing.

Strengthen Orders of Protection - S5877 - This bill makes clear that a victim of domestic violence who has an order of protection against her abuser cannot be accused of violating the order. Currently, domestic violence victims face too many obstacles in securing much needed protection from their abusers. This bill would remove many of those obstacles, and ensure that domestic violence victims get the protection they need.

Allow for Electronic Filing for Orders of Protection - S5878 - The legislation creates a pilot program to allow domestic violence victims to seek temporary orders of protection through electronic means rather than having to appear in person. The bill also requires the Office of Court Administration review and update their policies and services for all crime victims in the courts to make sure that their needs are being met, and so that victims are truly protected.

Toughen Human Trafficking Laws - S5879 - This bill strengthens the state's human trafficking laws to ensure more effective enforcement and prosecution and to give additional protections to victims. Among other things, the bill will change age provisions to mirror sex offense statutes and treat prostitution and sex trafficking involving minors as sex offenses; increase criminal penalties for trafficking, particularly when the crime victim is a minor; and create an affirmative defense in prostitution prosecutions if the defendant was a sex trafficking victim.

End Pregnancy Discrimination – S5880 – This legislation requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with pregnancy-related medical conditions

The bills were sent to the Assembly.