



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Dean G. Skelos

## Senate Passes Bill Preventing Human Trafficking and Giving Greater Protection to Trafficked Victims

DEAN G. SKELOS June 12, 2014

The New York State Senate today unanimously passed legislation to save lives by preventing the exploitation of children and adults who are victims of human trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act ([S5879B](#)), sponsored by Senator Andrew Lanza (R-I-C, Staten Island), toughens penalties against those who buy and sell young women, men and children and reduces the stigma defendants may face when they are victims of the massive \$32 billion sex trafficking industry.

Senator Lanza said, “Human trafficking is a modern version of the slave trade and a devastating human rights violation that is occurring in our own backyards. Here in New York, thousands of innocent people are bought and sold like property each year. I'm proud to have authored and passed the long-awaited Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act (TVPJA) to enhance protections for trafficking victims and hold those who exploit them accountable. I thank Assemblywoman Paulin, Senator Skelos and the many advocates who helped make this possible.”

Senate Majority Co-Leader Dean G. Skelos said, “The Senate took action today on two bills designed to further protect and enhance women's rights in the Empire State, including legislation to help put an end to the despicable practice of human trafficking. This bill is a key provision of the New York State Senate Women's Equality Agenda, a series of measures that will empower women and break down barriers that perpetuate violence, discrimination and inequality based on gender. Since we passed the human trafficking bill a year ago, lives continue to be placed in danger while we wait for the Assembly to join us in acting. I join with Assemblywoman Amy Paulin in urging the Assembly to pass this bill immediately.”

Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, the bill's author in the Assembly, said, “I am thrilled that the Senate voted to pass the TVPJA. It's an important step in curtailing the horrible practice of buying and selling human beings in New York State and I applaud the Senate for taking this step. However to get this bill signed into law, the Assembly must allow it to be voted on as a stand-alone measure. While I wholeheartedly support each of the 10 points

outlined in the WEA, I urge my colleagues to put aside the politics so that we can give human trafficking victims the help they desperately need today.”

Sonia Ossorio, President of the National Organization for Women in New York City (NOW-NYC), a hub of trafficking activity, said, “It is a very good day for trafficking victims across New York State who deserve this compassion and support from our lawmakers. And it's a bad day for the violent traffickers who exploit our most neglected and in-need children, and the predator men who think nothing of buying children for sex. We join in thanking Senator Lanza for being a dedicated leader who never forgot about the victims and used his position to keep this important legislation front and center. And the Senate leadership for bringing it to the floor for a vote and we look to the Assembly leadership to do the same. Ending the business of human trafficking, providing services and compassion to victims and strengthening New York's response to this miserable crime is something everyone should be able to agree on.”

“Human trafficking is a scourge on all communities and all walks of life,” said Lisa Hofflich, co-chairwoman of the Junior League's NYSPAC. “The 7,500 women of the Junior League, representing 17 communities throughout New York State decided to come together to help tackle this atrocious issue because we are mothers and sisters. We know this is happening in upscale towns and inner city neighborhoods. It has to end in New York now.”

Key provisions of the measure include increasing the accountability of traffickers and buyers by raising the penalty for sex trafficking to a class B violent felony; creating the felony sex offense of “aggravated patronizing a minor”; and aligning the penalties for patronizing a minor with those of statutory rape.

The bill will also strengthen the investigative tools to make a case against traffickers. Sex trafficking will be an affirmative defense to prostitution and the term “prostitute” will be eliminated from the Penal Law, as that term stigmatizes defendants who are in fact victims of sex trafficking. Nowhere else in the state's Penal Law are individuals identified by the crime they allegedly committed.

In May, Senator Lanza and Assemblywoman Paulin held a press conference with the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition, comprised of 140 organizations throughout the state, including NOW-NYC, Sanctuary For Families, and The New York State Public Affairs Committee (NYSPAC) of the Junior League, were in attendance. Several trafficking survivors spoke, including a young Ukrainian woman who was trafficked by her boyfriend while she was in college. Survivors who are part of an all-girls teen trafficking network also performed an excerpt from a play about their commercial sexual exploitation.

Senator Lanza introduced the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act last year. One portion of the comprehensive bill was signed into law ([S5839A](#)) in January. It allows 16- and 17-year-olds charged with prostitution and loitering for purposes of prostitution to be treated in criminal courts as Persons In Need of

Supervision (PINS) and provide those youth with specialized services.

This bill was also passed in June 2013 as part of the Senate's Women's Equality Agenda.

The bill will be sent to the Assembly.