



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Hugh T. Farley

Sen. Farley Reports Senate Passes Bill to Make Residential Youth Facilities Safer

HUGH T. FARLEY June 13, 2014

| ISSUE: **CRIME**



State Senator Hugh T. Farley (R, C, I – Schenectady) reports that he and his colleagues in the New York State Senate recently passed a measure to protect the staff and youth in group homes and other youth residential facilities. “Renee’s Law” (S2625B) 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.

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

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

