



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Betty Little

## Senate passes women's equality legislation

BETTY LITTLE June 17, 2014

| ISSUE: **WOMEN**

Bills Approved To Prevent Discrimination Based on Family Status; Stop Housing Discrimination Against Domestic Violence Victims; and Ensure Equal Pay for Women

The New York State Senate today passed three bills – all part of the Senate’s Women’s Equality Agenda – that would prevent employment discrimination against people with families, stop housing discrimination against victims of domestic violence, and ensure women receive equal pay for equal work

Senate Majority Co-Leader Dean G. Skelos said, “The Senate continues to make progress on bills designed to further protect and enhance women's rights in the Empire State. The bills approved by the Senate today to ensure equal pay and stop discrimination in housing and employment are key provisions 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. We passed these bills last year and urge the Assembly to pass them immediately.”

### STOPPING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON FAMILY STATUS

The Senate unanimously passed legislation (S5875), sponsored by Senator Betty Little (R-C-I, Queensbury), to help working mothers by preventing discrimination in the hiring and promotion of people with families. The bill prohibits employers from denying work or promotions based on family status, such as parents and women who are pregnant.

Senator Betty Little said, “Being a parent should not be the basis for someone being denied a job or a promotion. It’s wrong, regardless of whom it happens to, but this type of discrimination mostly targets women, especially lower-income. This measure would add family status to the section of state law that already prohibits employment discrimination based on age, race, military status or marital status, among many others. It’s a reasonable

protection for parents and their children.”

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

## PREVENTING HOUSING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS

The Senate also unanimously passed legislation (S5876), sponsored by Senator Joseph Robach (R-C-I, Rochester), to protect victims of domestic violence from housing discrimination.

Senator Robach said, “I applaud my colleagues in the State Senate for passing this critical legislation that will protect victims of domestic violence by assuring them that their employment or housing will not be lost due to their victimization. A victim of domestic or sexual violence should not have to fear that she will end up losing her job because of the violence committed against her. I urge the members of the Assembly not to wait any longer and take up this legislation immediately.”

Jaime Saunders, CEO of Alternatives for Battered Women, said, “The success of services such as Alternatives for Battered Women is limited when our clients are denied the ability to buy or rent housing because of the assumptions that the prospective seller or landlord may have about victims of domestic violence. Without safe housing options, many victims are forced to return back to their abuser, putting their family’s lives at risk. We thank the State Senate for working so hard to remove these critical life-saving barriers for families by making housing discrimination based on domestic violence history no longer allowable under New York State law.”

Discrimination against victims of domestic violence is almost always discrimination against women. Eighty-five percent of domestic violence victims are women; 1.3 million women are victims of assault by an intimate partner each year, and it’s estimated that one in four women will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetimes. Many of these victims are forced to stay with or return to their abusive partners because of lack of available housing or they are refused housing.

This measure would prohibit discrimination against domestic violence victims in housing, and, under the provisions of the bill, a violation of this prohibition would be a misdemeanor. The legislation also allows the option of a civil action for a violation of the prohibition.

## ENSURING EQUAL PAY

The Senate approved legislation (S5872), sponsored by Senator Diane Savino (D-Staten Island), that would ensure that women receive the wages they are entitled to by prohibiting employers from paying employees disparate amounts due to gender.

Despite existing protections under the law, women in New York earn 84 percent of what men earn and jobs traditionally held by women pay significantly less than jobs predominately employing men. In New York, on average, a woman working full time is paid \$42,113 per year, while a man working full time is paid \$50,388 per year. This creates a wage gap of \$8,275 between full-time working men and women in the state. The bill would ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work.

All three of these measures were also passed in June 2013 as part of the Senate's Women's Equality Agenda.

The bills have been sent to the Assembly.

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