



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Important Bills Passed This Week: Awarding High School Diplomas To All Veterans, Protecting State Parks, and More!

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS May 20, 2015



### IMPORTANT BILLS PASSED THIS WEEK

**Andrea Stewart-Cousins**  
*Senate Democratic Leader*  
*New York State Senator, 35th District*

**Awarding High School Diplomas To All Veterans:** Under current law, Operation Recognition permits issuance of high school diplomas to WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans only. Senate Bill S.3408 will expand eligibility to include all veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

**Protecting State Parks:** The legislation, Senate Bill S.956, was sponsored by Democratic Senator Jose Serrano and prohibits littering on our state's park lands and creates stringent penalties for violators. A first offense would result in a fine not to exceed \$750 and/or not

more than 10 hours of community service at a State Park. Second or subsequent offenses would result in a fine not to exceed \$1,400 and/or not more than 15 hours of community service at a State Park.

**Banning Smoking Near Schools and After-School Programs:** Smoking has been banned in all workplaces in New York since 2003 when the Clean Indoor Air Act passed. Since then smokers have been forced outside and no legislation has barred New Yorkers from smoking near after-school programs and entrances to school buildings where children enter and exit. According the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can cause symptoms, respiratory infections, and increase cancer risk in children. Senate Bill S.993-A, sponsored by Democratic Senator Gustavo Rivera, will prohibit smoking within 100 feet of after-school programs, schools and their entrances.

**Combating Cyberbullying:** Bullying has long been a perennial problem among school-aged children. The advent of social media has given bullies nearly unlimited access to targets reachable through mobile phones and computers in private and public forums even when not using their devices. The Centers for Disease Control cite suicide as the number three cause of death among young people and a Yale study reports that bullied youth are 5 times more likely to commit suicide than non-bullied youth. Senate Bill S.865 defines cyber-bullying as engaging in acts of abusive behavior over a period of time by communication sent by mechanical or electronic means, or posting statements on the Internet or through a computer network. Under this legislation, cyber-bullying against a minor would be an unclassified misdemeanor punishable by a fine and possible imprisonment.