



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

SERINO FIGHTS TO EMPOWER VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

SUSAN SERINO June 7, 2016

| ISSUE: **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

ALBANY, NY—Senator Sue Serino (R, C, I—Hyde Park) announced today that her bill to simplify legal notices of rights for victims of domestic violence passed in the Senate.

“The protections we have in place for victims of domestic violence simply do not work, if those victims do not know they exist or do not understand them,” said Senator Serino. “We have a responsibility to ensure that victims of domestic violence fully understand their rights and this bill is about making that kind of information—information they need to move forward when seeking justice—more accessible and easier to digest. It is about simplifying the process to ensure that the protections we have in place serve their purpose and empower those who have been victimized.”

In a well-intended effort to help victims of domestic violence, in 1994 New York added requirements to provide victims with notices of their express protections. However, the judicial system has since recognized a new and unforeseen issue—the required notices are overly complex and riddled with legalese, and many victims, especially those without representation, have difficulty understanding the information provided and the protections available leaving them vulnerable.

“While the court system has tried to overcome any language barriers that would impede access to this information by making the notices available to victims in eight languages online, legal jargon can often be

a language of its own that many New Yorkers have trouble understanding regardless of their native language, especially in times of duress,” Serino continued.

For this reason, upon the recommendation of the Chief Administrative Judge, Serino introduced this bill (S. 6956) which would simplify the notices without compromising the breadth or integrity of information provided. This proposed language drastically reduces the average grade level required to understand the notices, going from 14.0, college level, to 6.7 which translates to a 6th grade reading level. Additionally, it reduces many text statistics such as character, syllable and word counts while nearly doubling the “Readability Score,” meaning it is easier for all New Yorkers to understand.

“The last thing that victims of domestic violence need to worry themselves with, as they work to rebuild their lives, is needlessly complicated obstacles,” said Senator Serino. “If we can simplify any step of the process, without jeopardizing their rights or safety, we absolutely should in order to help them move forward.”