



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Senator Young Urges Acting Commissioner of OPWDD to Cease Placement of Sex Offenders in Group Homes

CATHARINE YOUNG December 17, 2018

Albany, NY – Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-57<sup>th</sup> District) today sent a letter to the Commissioner of the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to halt the practice of placing convicted sex offenders in state-run group homes for the developmentally disabled.

The practice came to light several weeks ago after the families of four group home residents in Saratoga County went public after discovering that a Level 2 sex offender was scheduled to be placed in the home after being released from prison, without their notification or consent. The registered sex offender was convicted of third degree rape in both 2011 and 2014.

A subsequent investigation by the advocacy organization, the Jonathan Carey Foundation, revealed that approximately 40 paroled Level 2 and 3 sex offenders with diagnosed developmental disabilities are currently housed in state-run homes and facilities. The report also found that the families of disabled individuals living in these homes are not notified when a sex offender is placed in the residence.

“It is unconscionable that the safety of New York’s most vulnerable residents is being compromised by a state policy that places registered sex offenders in group homes,” said Senator Young. “This practice places occupants and visitors in a potentially dangerous

situation where they may be exposed to individuals who have committed serious felonies such as sexual assault and rape.”

“The parents of developmentally disabled sons and daughters spend their lives fighting to protect their children from every type of possible threat. Most would never imagine that the greatest danger to their loved ones might come from within the group home where they live.”

Senator Young noted that the Senate has been pushing for action on this issue, initiating and passing Senate Bill 3027 that would prohibit the placement of any registered sex offender in a community residence operated by the Office of Mental Health or the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. The bill has not been acted on by the Assembly.

She also expressed strong support for a newly introduced bill she is co-sponsoring, Senate Bill 9169, that would require sex offenders with developmental disabilities to be placed in specially designated residences, apart from the general population of developmentally disabled individuals, but that provide an equal level of care and services.

“I feel strongly that these offenders should be housed separately from other OPWDD clients. This solution would enable the agency to fulfill its responsibilities to all parties while simultaneously protecting innocent New Yorkers who reside in group homes,” Senator Young said.

“Taking this step would also ease the worries of residents in neighborhoods where group homes are sited. I have received many concerned calls in recent weeks from residents of my district who have group homes nearby and who are worried about the possible threat these offenders pose to area children and the public in general. Securing support for future group homes may be even more difficult unless we take action.”

“Because many group home residents are unable to advocate for themselves, there is no way to know with any certainty if any harm or abuse has occurred in group homes because of this practice. However, taking quick and decisive action to relocate the current sex offenders residing in group homes will help assure their safety and well-being. I implore the Governor and Acting Commissioner Delaney to stand up for those we have a responsibility to protect.”