

NEWS FROM Legislator

Lou D'Amaro



SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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PRESS RELEASE

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SEXUAL PREDATORS PROHIBITED FROM RESIDING NEAR THEIR VICTIMS

*Legislator D'Amaro's New Law Keeps Sex Offenders
At Least ¼ Mile from their Victim's Homes and Workplaces*

(HUNTINGTON STATION, NY...December 1, 2009) – Seeking to remedy a glaring gap in Suffolk County's existing sex offender residency restriction laws, County Legislator Lou D'Amaro (D - Huntington Station) has authored legislation to prohibit registered sex offenders from living in close proximity to their victims' homes and workplaces. The bill was overwhelmingly approved at the County Legislature's December 1st meeting and now goes before County Executive Steve Levy, who is expected to sign it into law.

Specifically, Introductory Resolution 1895-2009, which was unanimously approved by the Legislature's Public Safety Committee last week, would make it unlawful for all registered sex offenders to reside within a ¼ mile of the residence or principal place of employment of the victim (s) of their crime (s). The bill enhances the County's existing residency restrictions, which prohibit offenders from residing within a ¼ mile of the property line of any school, playground, or licensed day care facility. Like the prior restrictions, D'Amaro's bill will remain in effect for as long as the offender is classified as a registered sex offender but shall not apply to registered sex offenders who have established a residence prior to the law's effective date.

"This bill is essential to protecting one of the most vulnerable segments of our population," said Legislator D'Amaro. "Sex offenders frequently leave their victims with significant emotional and psychological wounds, in addition to any physical harm caused. Victims of sex crimes may easily feel re-victimized by seeing or speaking with their attacker, or even knowing that they live down the street, which is why they need to have the option of prohibiting the offender from residing nearby."

(more)

These sentiments were echoed by Laura Ahearn, Executive Director of Parent's for Megan's Law and the Crime Victims Center, who was a strong supporter of the new legislation and worked cooperatively with Legislator D'Amato to help pass the bill.

"Victims of sexual assault often suffer serious, long-term psychological effects related to the crime, including post-traumatic stress disorder," said Ahearn. "They often feel vulnerable and unsafe, and exposure to their perpetrator may trigger a wide range of emotional reactions such as shock, anxiety, and depression. Traumatic event anniversaries are in of themselves very difficult to cope with so one might imagine how traumatic it would be if their offender is permitted to live within close proximity to their home or workplace."

According to Ahearn, in Suffolk County there are two separate cases that her agency is aware of where registered sex offenders moved into locations within less than a ¼ of a mile of their victims. In the first case, the offender rented a home in which the backyard actually met the yard of an adult female he had sexually assaulted years earlier. The unimaginable happened when law enforcement personnel completed their neighborhood notification requirements and knocked on the victim's door to hand her a copy of the notification, which included details of the crime the offender had committed against her and a photo of the assailant. Fortunately, the offender moved into a more appropriate rental unit and the victim was spared any further contact. In the second case, a two-time convicted sex offender moved into the same neighborhood where the victim he raped lives and he currently resides there today.

"There is absolutely no reason why victims of sexual assault should have to deal with harrowing experiences such as these," said D'Amato. "It is unconscionable for someone who has already endured a tragedy to continue to live in constant fear and agony. This law will protect the rights of victims and prevent them from being re-traumatized by giving them a mechanism to remedy a potentially intolerable situation."

The need for D'Amato's bill is even more critical when one accounts for the extremely high rates of sex offender recidivism. United States Justice Department statistics show that rapists repeat their offenses at rates up to 35%, offenders who molest young girls, at rates up to 29%, and offenders who molest young boys, at rates up to 40%.

"These statistics are extremely alarming," said D'Amato. "They clearly illustrate that sexually violent predators pose a continuing danger to the public even after they are released from incarceration. The citizens of Suffolk County, and victims of sexual assault in particular, require protection from this danger which is why I applaud my colleagues for promptly approving my bill."

"The passage of this law will provide victims of sexual abuse and rape, or their parents/guardians, a mechanism to prevent registered sex offenders from exercising any degree of control by having the power to further re-victimize and traumatize their victims," added Ahearn. "I would like to commend Legislator D'Amato for his commitment to protecting child and adult victims from re-traumatization at the hands of their perpetrators and for approaching us to work collaboratively with him to ensure that this law would provide victims with a tool to protect themselves from further harm."

Suffolk County Legislator Lou D'Amato (D-Huntington Station) represents the 17th Legislative District, which includes parts of North Babylon, Deer Park, Dix Hills, Melville, West Hills, Huntington, South Huntington, and Huntington Station. He is Chairman of the Ways and Means committee, Vice-Chairman of the Budget & Finance committee, Vice-Chairman of the Environment, Planning and Agriculture committee; and a member of the Consumer Protection committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.