



NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
OFFICE OF ASSEMBLYMEMBER ARAVELLA SIMOTAS

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SIMOTAS BILL TO HELP HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PASSES THE ASSEMBLY

Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas today hailed passage of her bill to help victims of human trafficking in New York State. The bill, which passed the Assembly on June 8, requires the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to create and make available a poster that would let people know help is available to trafficking victims and that just one phone call to a special 800 number can free them from servitude. A companion bill passed the State Senate on June 7.

"This bill would put vital information in places where victims can see it and give them a chance to be saved from this atrocious form of modern-day slavery," Assemblywoman Simotas said.

"I want to thank NYS Supreme Court Justice Lee Richard Price and the New York County Lawyers Association for bringing this to my attention. We need to do everything possible to end this horrifying subjugation of human beings," Simotas added.

"I am extremely pleased with this legislation and the added protection it would give to victims of trafficking. I commend the legislature for their progressive thinking and diligent work," said Justice Richard Lee Price, Bronx County Supreme Court, Criminal Term. Justice Price is the Chair of the Law Related Education Committee at the New York County Lawyers Association

"My work with Justice Richard Lee Price at the New York County Lawyers Association, on the protection of the rights of women and children, sensitized me to the blight of modern day slavery. When I saw a sex-trafficking hotline poster at a Maryland rest- stop on I-95, I took a photo and sent it to Justice Price. He then brought the idea to Assemblywoman Simotas. I am thrilled that the New York State Legislature has passed a bill which could alleviate the suffering of thousands of victims of trafficking throughout New York State," said attorney Marian Burnbaum, Secretary of the NY County Lawyers Association Law Related Education Committee.

Simotas's bill mandates that the posters give the name and toll-free number for the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline, at 1-888-373-7888.

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The National Human Trafficking Resource Center was created for the express purpose of providing victims of human trafficking “with access to critical support and services to get help and stay safe.” The hotline is a 24/7 service, operated with support from the U.S. Justice Department.

The bill requires the following statement be included on the poster:

“If you or someone you know is being forced to engage in any activity and cannot leave – whether it is commercial sex, housework, farm work, or any other similar activity – call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 to access help and services. Victims of human trafficking are eligible for protections and services under United States and New York State laws. The hotline is:

1. Available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week;
2. Tool-free;
3. Operated by a non-profit, non-governmental organization;
4. Anonymous and confidential;
5. Accessible in one hundred seventy languages; and
6. Able to help, referral to services, training and general information.”

Under provisions of the bill, these informational posters would be made available for placement in public places where they are likely to be seen by trafficking victims. These locations include: bus stations, highway rest stops and truck stops, airports, adult or sexually oriented businesses, hospitals and urgent care centers.

“Once the bill becomes law, I intend to monitor its effectiveness. If additional measures are needed to spread the word about this critical hotline, then I’m prepared to draft another bill,” Simotas said.

Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud or coercion to trap people into various forms of servitude. People are trafficked not only for sex, but also to perform housework, childcare, restaurant, farm and construction work and other labor, receiving no pay or grossly low pay. Immigrant victims of human trafficking often have their identification and travel documents taken away, can’t speak English and live in a constant state of fear. Domestically trafficked victims are often young runaways who end up in sexual servitude.

Last year Governor Cuomo signed the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act which increases penalties for perpetrators and makes victims eligible for state social services.

Aravella Simotas is the New York State Assembly Member representing the 36th District, in Astoria, Queens. She took office in January 2011 and is the first Greek American woman elected to office in New York and the first woman elected to represent the 36th District.

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