

**STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE FOR THE PREVENTION
OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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**GOVERNOR SIGNS HISTORIC “FAIR ACCESS TO FAMILY COURT” BILL
INTO LAW**

Governor David A. Paterson has signed a historic new law that will ensure that all victims of domestic violence are able to seek a civil order of protection in New York.

The new law expands access to civil orders of protection to intimate partners, including dating couples, same-sex couples, and teen-age couples. This bill ensures that related protections, such as strengthened arrest requirements of abusers and stricter penalties for certain violations of orders of protection are also available to this expanded group of individuals.

“Our laws need to be strong and they need to reflect the times we live in. Victims of domestic violence – women, men, married, single, gay, straight, young and old – all deserve the best protection the law can provide,” said Governor David A. Paterson. “With this new law, many more people than ever before will be afforded the chance to live safe lives. This law is an important piece of the state’s broader strategy to respond to and prevent domestic violence.”

Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein introduced this bill 20 years ago to ask that New York law recognize the full range of victims who need civil legal protection. This year, with the combined efforts of 190 groups represented by the New York Statewide Coalition for Fair Access to Family Courts, state and local government, and an unwavering commitment from Governor David A. Paterson, the bill passed the Assembly and Senate unanimously and is now signed into law. The bill was sponsored by Assemblywoman Weinstein and Senator George Winner.

Amy Barasch, executive director of the state’s Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence said: “This is truly a momentous day in New York State. Finally, dating and same sex couples will have access to this essential legal option. After twenty years of tireless advocacy, all those who worked towards the passage of this bill have reason to be proud. The leadership of Governor Paterson and his commitment to the issue of domestic violence is commendable.”

Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein, chair of the Assembly’s Judiciary Committee said: “Civil orders of protection often work – they can stop and prevent future violence. By allowing the close to 50 percent of domestic violence victims in dating and intimate relationships fair access to Family Court civil orders of protection, they will finally be able to obtain the long overdue protection they need and deserve.”

Senator George Winner said: “I commend Governor Paterson's swift action on signing this legislation into law. It's been a long time coming to bring New York in line with every other state in the nation, and this year's success is a great credit to every advocate who persevered throughout this longstanding effort. I'm pleased that we're finally acting to provide all victims of domestic violence with equal protection.”

Jessica F. Vasquez, executive director of the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence said: “The hard work and perseverance of many has come to fruition in this resounding victory to ensure fair and equitable access to civil orders of protection for all victims of domestic violence. We especially thank Governor Paterson for his commitment to correct this injustice, and the bill sponsors, Assemblywoman Weinstein and Senator Winner, whose leadership prevailed against the many struggles in advancing this bill. Most of all, we thank the innumerable advocates whose tireless work assisting victims of domestic violence has long informed us that too many victims had fundamental legal options closed to them, and whose 20-year effort to expand those options will make New York’s response to domestic violence more effective and more just.”

Stephanie Nilva, Executive Director of Day One, which partners with youth in New York City to end dating abuse and domestic violence, said: “This is a landmark day for survivors of domestic violence in New York State. Young victims of dating abuse who seek help from Day One will be able to lead safer lives as a result of this new legislation. We are thrilled that the Governor and state legislature have taken this step to protect victims across the state.”

Lisa Frisch, Executive Director of the Legal Project, which provides free and low cost legal services to underserved residents of the Capital District said: “This will make a tremendous difference in the lives of so many victims who were too afraid or were unable to get assistance from the criminal courts in the past and we applaud the Governor, the Legislature and the hundreds of domestic violence advocates from across the state who have worked tirelessly over the past 20 years to make this a reality.”

Domestic violence is the single largest cause of injury to women in the United States, and according to the US Department of Justice, in recent years 1/3 of all female homicide victims in the U.S. have been killed by their intimate partners. In New York State, police departments receive approximately 450,000 calls for service to resolve domestic violence each year. Research indicates that up to half of domestic violence incidents are not reported to the police, so the actual number of incidents in New York State may be close to a million each year.

The New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) is a state agency charged with improving the response of state and local communities to domestic violence. OPDV provides guidance to Executive level staff on policy and legislation and conducts statewide community outreach and public education programs. OPDV trains professionals on addressing domestic violence in a wide array of disciplines, including child welfare, law enforcement, local district social service providers, and health care professionals.

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