



GRANT MERIT TIME FOR INCARCERATED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

Bill: A.06150/S.3164

Sponsor: Assemblywoman Weinstein, Senator Volker

NYSPAC Position: SUPPORT

The New York State Public Affairs Committee (NYSPAC) of the Junior League supports the enactment of legislation on merit time provisions for incarcerated victims of domestic violence. We support the New York State Assembly's and Senate's efforts to pass legislation on this important issue, **and urge the Members to work together to enact A.06150/S.3164 immediately.**

Physical, sexual, and psychological abuse is a chronic problem both in New York State and nationwide. Studies suggest that such abuse frequently leads the victims – the majority of whom are women – to commit crimes (against their abusers or others) and to their eventual incarceration. Many of the domestic violence survivors who are held in New York jails are first-time offenders who, had they not been subject to such abuse in the first place, might well have avoided being put in prison.

To ease the burden on both the prison system and these generally lower-risk offenders and their families, A.06150/S.3164 would grant incarcerated survivors of domestic violence an opportunity to prove that their victimization was a substantial factor in the crime for which they were convicted, thereby allowing them to earn merit time or early release. Studies have shown that female inmates who would benefit from this bill pose virtually no threat to public safety, have lower recidivism rates than the general prison population, and often have neither prior criminal records nor a history of violence. In order to be considered for merit time or early release under this provision, survivors would have to meet the stringent guidelines outlined in the bill to prove a direct connection between their abuse by a family or household member and the commission of the crime for which they were convicted.

Inmates who have committed sexual offenses or crimes related to terrorism would not be eligible for merit time under this bill.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the average cost of incarcerating a person for a year in a New York State prison is \$37,000. To the extent that imprisoned survivors can meet the strict guidelines for early release outlined under the bill, the application of merit time or early release in those cases may result in a significant cost savings to New York State. Of the other states that have considered this issue, California is currently the only state that has sought to legally address, track, and identify the prevalence of and correlation between being a survivor of domestic violence and incarceration, by screening female inmates for a psychological condition commonly known as “Battered Woman Syndrome.” We believe passage of this bill would set a strong example to the rest of the country as to the importance of supporting survivors of abuse.

NYSPAC strongly supports A.06150/S.3164, which gives incarcerated victims of domestic violence the opportunity to earn merit time or early release in appropriate circumstances. This law would benefit the prison system, the abused incarcerated victim and the children of that victim, who may otherwise suffer both as a result of the original abuse that led to the crime as well as the enforced separation from their victimized parent.

On behalf of the more than 7,000 women represented by the 19 Junior Leagues of New York, we **urge the Codes and Judicial Committees to support bills A.06150 and S3164, and provide domestic violence survivors and their families a chance at restoring their lives.**

For more information, please contact Lauren Jenkins: jenkins.lauren@gmail.com.

Junior Leagues of New York State:

- Junior League of Binghamton*
31 Front Street - Binghamton 13905
- Junior League of Bronxville*
P.O. Box 430 - Bronxville 10708
- Junior League of Brooklyn*
55 Pierrepont Street - Brooklyn 11201
- Junior League of Buffalo*
45 Elmwood Avenue - Buffalo 14201
- Junior League of Central Westchester*
1039 Post Road - Scarsdale 10583
- Junior League of Elmira-Corning*
P.O. Box 3150 - Elmira 14905
- Junior League of Kingston*
P.O. Box 1214 - Kingston 12402
- Junior League of Long Island*
1395 Old Northern Blvd - Roslyn 11576
- Junior League of the City of New York*
130 East 80th Street - New York 10021
- Junior League of Northern Westchester*
222 East Main Street - Mt. Kisco 10549
- Junior League of Orange County*
P.O. Box 515 - Middletown 10940
- Junior League of Pelham*
901 Pelhamdale Avenue - Pelham Manor 10803
- Junior League of Poughkeepsie*
794 Main Street - Poughkeepsie 12603
- Junior League of Rochester*
110 Linden Oaks, Suite A - Rochester 14625
- Junior League of Schenectady*
P.O. Box 857 - Schenectady 12301
- Junior League of Syracuse*
930 James Street - Syracuse 13203
- Junior League of Troy*
P.O. Box 1161 - Troy 12180
- Junior League of Westchester on Hudson*
35 South Broadway - Tarrytown 10591
- Junior League of Westchester on the Sound*
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For more information, contact the Junior League nearest you.