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Governor Christie Signs 'Stephen Komninos' Law' Strengthening Protections for People with Developmental Disabilities

Friday, October 6, 2017

Tags: [Bill Action](#)

Trenton, NJ - Governor Chris Christie today signed "Stephen Komninos' Law" to strengthen protections for people with developmental disabilities. This legislation, named for a 22-year-old who died in a local group home, is the result of a collaboration with Stephen's father, Tom, among other parental advocates and Senate President Stephen Sweeney.

"This new law strengthens protections for people with developmental disabilities and their families, requiring more state oversight and consistent supervision of community-based residential programs," Governor Christie said. "It will help prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disabilities, establishing appropriately serious criminal penalties and mandating drug testing of staff members. This bipartisan effort balances the most-effective, efficient protections with the interests of confidentiality and flexibility in an unbiased process of investigating potential abuses. I thank Tom, the Senate President, and all of the other parents for providing invaluable input and cooperation to complete this compromise measure."

The law, which incorporates Governor Christie's recommendations:

Requires the state Department of Human Services (DHS) to make two unannounced visits annually to community-based residential programs (including group homes and supervised apartments) to see whether residents are at risk of, or subject to, abuse, neglect, or exploitation;

Requires providers of community-based residential programs and day programs to notify the guardian or other family member of an individual with a developmental disability of an injury that occurs, within two hours of the injury (or 8 hours in extraordinary circumstances);

Requires DHS to send an employee to a developmental center or community-based residential program within 48 hours of a report of moderate or major injury, or abuse, neglect, or exploitation;

Requires drug testing of direct care staff members at any programs, facilities, or living arrangements funded by the Division of Developmental Disabilities;

Requires developmental centers to have meetings with parents twice a year and for other programs to increase communication among parents;

Increases the criminal penalty for failure to report abuse, neglect, or exploitation;

Increases the involvement of the families of individuals with developmental disabilities

DHS will have to allow guardians or other family members to submit information to facilitate investigations, to attend interviews of the individual the guardian represents, and to terminate the interview

DHS will have to provide guardians with a summary of the investigation

DHS will have to notify guardians if the investigation results in a caregiver being placed on the Central Registry of Offenders Against Individuals with Developmental Disabilities; and

Requires DHS to post this law on its public website.

Today's action enhances the Governor's commitment to protecting this vulnerable population. For example, in 2010, one of his first legislative acts as Governor established the Central Registry to ensure that people who have committed acts of abuse, neglect, or exploitation against individuals with developmental disabilities are prohibited from working

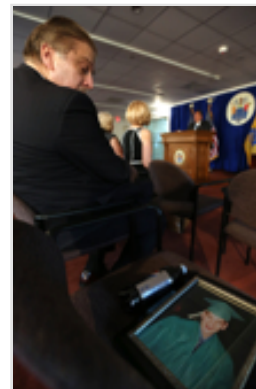
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with any other individuals with developmental disabilities. In 2015, the Governor signed legislation criminalizing the endangerment of a person with developmental disabilities and providing increased penalties for egregious actions against vulnerable New Jerseyans. In 2016, the Governor established a Task Force to analyze abuse, neglect and exploitation, specifically against senior citizens and people with disabilities. The Task Force, which has been meeting since January, is scheduled to present its findings in January 2018.

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