



Updated: Sun., May. 16, 2010, 5:03 AM

## Kendra's Law forever

Last Updated: 5:03 AM, May 16, 2010  
Posted: 12:52 AM, May 16, 2010

### **Why does the Paterson administration — particularly the state commissioner of mental health — oppose making Kendra's Law permanent?**

Enacted in 1999, that groundbreaking law authorizes court-ordered outpatient treatment for people with serious mental illness who have a history of violence when they go off their meds.

Specifically, it allows a judge to compel a person with serious mentally illness who refuses either to take medication or submit to supervised psychiatric treatment to do so as a condition for continuing to live in the general community.

The law was named for Kendra Webdale, the 32-year-old photographer and aspiring screenwriter who was pushed to her death in front of an oncoming N train by Andrew Goldstein, a schizophrenic who had stopped taking his medication.

With vigorous support from mental-health groups, victims' families and law-enforcement agencies, the law was enacted in 2000 — initially for a five-year trial period, because skeptics insisted it wouldn't work.

Then it was renewed for another five years in 2005, after the same skeptics dismissed research showing it did work.

It's set to expire again next month.

Yet, despite repeated studies showing the many benefits of the law for the mentally ill — not to mention for the general public, which is much safer when dangerously ill people receive treatment — the state still doesn't want to make it permanent.

Mental Health Commissioner Michael Hogan, incredibly, cites "the state's current budget crisis" to argue that "this is not the time to expand services."

So he and the governor are backing a Senate bill that would extend the bill for yet another five years — and set a new "sunset" date of June 2015.

But why not make permanent a law that even Hogan admits is working?

A bill introduced by two upstate legislators, Democratic Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther and GOP Sen. Catharine Young, would do just that — but even they concede that its chances for passage are slim.

Advocacy groups argue that people shouldn't be medicated against their will. And the aggressively clueless New York Civil Liberties Union argues, disingenuously, that Kendra's Law "has been used disparately against men of color."

But, as more responsible advocates note, the fact that the law is working ensures increased access to medical care for minority patients.

Would the NYCLU prefer to see those patients remain untreated — and then sent to prison for 25 to life, as was Andrew Goldstein, when someone else is pushed off a subway platform?

It's time for Albany to show some common sense for a change — and make Kendra's Law permanent.

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