‘KENDRA’S LAW’ GOOD FOR PUBLIC, MENTALLY ILL.(MAIN)

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The profound sadness and many difficulties that surround mental illness are too often exacerbated by an individual’s refusal to follow a prescribed medical treatment plan. This reluctance is not only harmful to the noncompliant patient, but also to their families and potentially dangerous to the public.

Such was the case earlier this year when Kendra Webdale was allegedly pushed in front of an oncoming subway train by a diagnosed schizophrenic who had stopped taking medication.

This incident was nothing short of tragic. Unfortunately, it is not isolated. For too long, many families have been forced to stand helplessly by as mentally ill loved ones... refusing to adhere to physician-prescribed treatment plans, spun through a revolving door of care. While these families witness firsthand the personal destruction of mental illness, they frequently have no power to stop or control it.

In an effort to prevent future tragedies and aid families as they seek to protect relatives, I have been joined by state Attorney General Elliot Spitzer in advocating for the enactment of "Kendra's Law."

While the specific incident that inspired "Kendra's Law" accurately depicts this as a public safety issue, we cannot overlook or minimize the importance of this bill for those struggling every day with mental illness. My bill will provide assistance and comfort to individuals living with mental illness and to the thousands of families who have nowhere to turn when a loved one is refusing to participate in medical treatment plans.

Under the bill, family members and caregivers could, with the support of a physician, obtain a court order to ensure that a mentally ill person takes his or her prescribed medication. If the mentally ill person violates the court order by going off medication, he or she could then be held for a 72-hour emergency evaluation to determine the need for more serious intervention.

It is unconscionable that under current law, a helpless family has to wait for a crisis or in extreme cases, terrible violence, before a loved one will access necessary treatment. The pain of mental illness is hard enough without forcing family members to go to sleep every night praying that their child, brother or sister will not turn violent and end up hurting themselves, a friend or a total stranger.

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