Bill allows abuse survivors to sue

Legislation is similar to the Child Victims Act passed in 2019

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A measure to allow adult survivors of sexual abuse to sue their abusers is gaining momentum in New York for the second year in a row.

On Tuesday, New York State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie announced a bill aimed at expanding a window that allows survivors to sue those who allegedly abused them as children.

The legislation traveled a similar path last year but died in the hands of the Assembly. The bill would allow a one-year window to sue their abusers, regardless of when the abuse occurred.

The legislation traveled a similar path last year but died in the Assembly, with Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes questioning whether adults needed extra time to report abuse in their past.

"Survivors of sexual assault and abuse in New York are subject to an unjust, restrictive statute of limitations that, for far too long, has prevented them from pursuing the justice they deserve," said New York State Trial Lawyers president Helen Bakushis this week.

What would the legislation do?

The bill is similar to the Child Victims Act, which passed in 2019 and gave adults a one-year window to sue.

The window was extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ultimately, the state passed the measure for more than 10,000 lawsuits in New York.

If the Adults Survivors Act is enacted as law, adult abuse survivors would have one year to launch a civil claim.

"Everyone deserves their chance at justice," said Peoples-Stokes.

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Police: Officer shoots, kills Hyde Park woman

State police investigated Friday an officer shooting and killing a woman at a home on Mill Road in Hyde Park.

State police said it and Hyde Park police are investigating an "officer involved shooting of a female subject." The Attorney General's Office has been notified.

"An officer was involved in which the death of a person occurred during interaction with low enforce- ment to be investigated by the state Attorney General's Office.

State police in its release did not right say an officer had fired and killed the woman for or what agency the officer involved.

The agency also didn’t provide informa- tion, how many officers and civilians were involved, how many officers fired the charged weapons, the nature of the in- formation the identities of any parties involved.

State police responded to the Journal Friday but did not issue any question posed.

The agency in its release said there was "no threat to the public," and said investigation is ongoing.

Earlier this month the Dutchess County District Attorney's Office an- nounced a Feb. 17 slaying of a man and woman during a struggle with Hyde- park town police officers who responded to a domestic dispute. Neither civilian was fatally wounded.

Two months after that incident, which involved school district police, much remains unknown including how many officers fired how many weapons and who was responsible for shooting whom.

Some details have also been shared, including the identity of the offi- cers in which a pedestrian who was struck by a vehicle in the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office vehicle.

From Left: Bridget Lander and Jessica Corcoran, school psychologists at Brinckerhoff Elementary School in Fishkill, go over a binder full of mindfulness activities compiled by Corcoran. PATRICK OEHLER/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

Schools

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"Since we were locked up in the house over time it created as much ten- sion over the internet because all we had was social media," Poughkeepsie High schoolenor Renae Rutter said. "Kids were like, 'Shut up, we're not being heard."

"It could be over the most little thing and they make it something so big," she said. "I don’t understand why, but with social media it becomes so big."

More than two years after the cir- cumstances surrounding COVID-19 up- turned the normal classroom experience, students are struggling to readjust to what would otherwise be considered a normal in-person schedule. School leaders and mental health professionals are working with students who say they are returning without the necessary so- cial skills to navigate conflict.

The pandemic did not start the problem, however. Circumstances surrounding COVID-19 were already on the precipice of a men- tal health crisis. But, students spent isolation during remote learning, in what were sometimes stressful home- environments, acclimated and exacer- bated that trajectory.

Dutchess County Director of Com- munity Services Jean-Matte Veltulie said she is seeing increased anxiety, conflict, depression, and refused to at- tend or participate in school among young people in the county.

More than a quarter of the residents who visited the Dutchess County Stabil- ization Center for all in its first quarter of this year, she said, were under the age of 21.

"Things were already headed in a not great direction for a young person, and there’s probably a million reasons why it would be hard to get away and try and grow," Nebulie said. "But when kids who had spent some kids really flawed, and some kids didn’t. And for the kids who felt, to some extent, out of that (time of isolation) and then just be ex- pected to come back to school and the way you’ve always done it (one too much)."

"It’s not just based out of mental health issues, it also comes from the social processes, some of the kids that struggled academically are having a real- ly hard time catching up, because they lost some of that from being remote," she added.

"You just get used to seeing it"

Josephine Scimeca opens her phone and within a few seconds up a video of a group of students punching and kicking another student in a hallway.

"The fight turned into a spectacle, with dozens crowding the Arlington High School hall, several with their phones out recording the conflict. At said there are times when students would have more of an awareness for their feelings. The number was one of the critical social media and text chats regularly at Arlington.

"It’s normalized," Scimeca, a senior at the Freedom Plains school, said looking back on the video that went viral among students. "Everyone just saw it and we had to learn to turn away from that."

She’s never seen those numbers as high before.

"It’s a great game of telephone and then twisted and changed," she said.

"Help me, I’m struggling"

While parents, school staff and stu- dents have witnessed firsthand a change in mental health amid the pan- demic, the numbers show students are also seeking out resources at a higher rate than before the pandemic started.

Astor Services provides a youth- oriented youth program that serves more than 3,000 clients each year.

The number of active clients in the Hudson Valley program reached its high in 2020 with 3,104, but it reported a drop down to 1,691 as of March, the program served 2,095 cli- ents.

The number of clients experi- encing a mental health crisis severe enough to require hospitalization through the program nearly doubled from 2019 to 2020, jumping from 148 to 275.

Gilled noted diagnosis for anxiety, depression, trauma, eating disorders and substance use are up on the rise from previous years.

In 2021, Astor’s outpatient program served 351 clients with anxiety, in the past three months it’s served 489. Last year, 831 clients received services for depressive disorder, compared to 565 this year as of March.

The Hudson Valley program and the Astor Services program at the Astor Center, which serves individuals in mental health crisis, has opened 34 new admissions in December, weeks after shots were fired outside Poughkeepsie High School, senior and student body Presi- dent Harrison Franklin-McKinnon said.

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The district has seen an increase in the number of violent and disruptive incidents reported from 40 in the 2018-19 school year to 48 this year, with 33 incidents reported so far this year. "We take things home and we are talking about our day, trying our best," said Kelly. "(Our) team is struggling to maintain."

"There are conflicts and sometimes someone felt that they were treated disrespectfully, someone felt that they didn't really know how to deal with something," said Bonnie Lander, a school psychologist in Wappingers. Nobody knows the answers, but certainly it's our challenge of this year's for our future."