

FIGHTING BACK

Public schools would teach students about preventing child sexual abuse under ‘Erin’s Law’

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ALBANY – Public schools in New York would soon have to teach students how to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation if Gov. Andrew Cuomo signs a recently passed bill into law.

State lawmakers approved “Erin’s Law” before ending their annual session last month, making New York the 37th state to adopt the measure after it had stalled in Albany since 2012.

Should Cuomo sign the bill, schools would be required to teach all K-8 students about child sexual abuse and steps they can take to stop it.

The state Education Department would have until July 1, 2020, to come up with regulations setting minimum requirements as well as provide technical assistance to schools on how to teach the material in an age-appropriate way.

Sen. Alessandra Biaggi, D-Pelham, Westchester County, a survivor of child sexual abuse, called the bill a “critical step to protect the safety of our children.”

“This legislation will empower children to speak up if they feel unsafe by providing students with the tools to report instances of sexual abuse and prevent further harm,” Biaggi said in a statement last month.

The bill is named after Erin Merryn, a child sexual abuse survivor who has traveled the country trying to get the bill passed in as many states as possible.

She made stops at the state Capitol this year and in previous years, urging lawmakers to put the bill to a vote. The Senate had approved the measure in prior years, but it never got through the Assembly.

That changed this year, when the Assembly voted 143-1 to approve the bill June 21 after the Senate voted 62-0 earlier in the month.

Assemblyman Christopher Friend, a Schuyler County Republican who is a frequent vote against legislation in Albany, was the lone lawmaker to vote against the bill.

In a statement, Merryn said lawmakers “finally did right by the children of New York.”

“The passage of Erin’s law sends a message to every sexual predator in New York and that is you will not get away with silencing children,” Merryn said.

The bill is currently under review by Cuomo’s office.

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