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NOW-NYC Applauds Senate and Assembly Bill to Combat Strangulation Attacks

Bill cracks down on “terrifying and life-threatening” abuse

New York, NY, May 18, 2010 – The National Organization for Women’s New York City Chapter today applauded an amended bill introduced in the Senate (S-6987A) and Assembly (A-10161A), which would criminalize strangulation attacks in New York State.

“This strong legislation will redress a longstanding injustice in New York,” said Jane Manning, president of NOW-NYC. “This will close a gap in the law that allows abusers to get away with a terrifying and life-threatening form of abuse.”

The bill was sponsored by Senator Eric Schneiderman and Assemblymembers Joseph Lentol and Helene Weinstein.

Incredibly, under existing New York State law, choking someone by squeezing or compressing his or her neck is not considered assault unless the victim sustains physical injury – as defined by New York’s high legal standard for physical injury. The required level of injury often is not met in non-fatal strangulation attacks.

Strangulation is especially common in domestic violence and sex crime cases, and surviving victims describe strangulation as an agonizing and terrifying ordeal. It is also highly dangerous. It takes only 11 pounds of pressure, applied for just 10 seconds, to choke someone unconscious. With more pressure, death can occur within minutes. Ten percent of violent deaths in the United States are strangulations.

Yet strangulation often leaves few or no visible signs. In a study of 100 strangulation attacks, the San Diego District Attorney’s office found that in 62 of them, police officers reported no visible injuries, and in 22 others, signs like redness or scratches on the neck were too minor to photograph. Battered women’s advocates in New York State report that, when a victim of a strangulation attack does not demonstrate visible injuries, police often conclude that there is not enough physical injury to constitute an assault and leave without making an arrest.

The new law would change this, making it a crime to choke or suffocate someone, whether or not the victim sustains physical injury.

“This bill if enacted can save lives,” said Manning. “We will be able to hold an abuser accountable for the first strangling attack instead of waiting for a subsequent, lethal one. We applaud the sponsors and urge the legislature to act swiftly to pass this much-needed law.”

The National Organization for Women is the nation’s largest organization working to advance women’s rights and improve women’s lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is one of the largest chapters in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to protect women’s reproductive choices, end violence against women and eliminate sex discrimination in our schools, workplaces, and the justice system in New York.