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Voices

NY Democratic Leaders Must Tap “Mothers’ Vote” to Boost the Harris/Walz Ticket

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Catherine Kassenoff, seen here with two of her three children took her own life in an assisted suicide in a Swiss clinic in May, 2023. Although she was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she claimed in a final Facebook post that it was the Family Court blocking her from seeing her three children for years that triggered her decision to take her own life at an assisted suicide clinic in Switzerland (Photo: Facebook)

New York Democratic Leaders Must Tap “Mothers’ Vote” to Boost the Harris/Walz Ticket

New York Democratic leaders may not know this, but they are at the apex of a hidden voting bloc in their home state and across the country. Most importantly, this voting constituency transcends blue states and red states, and battleground states. The bloc is made up of thousands of mothers who have united on social media and elsewhere because they share a common plight. Their stories saturate the media, and intone the same theme: they beg judges to protect their children from violent, alcoholic, drug-addicted, and physically and sexually abusive fathers but are, instead, punished with the loss of custody of their children. Paradoxically, instead of heeding the mother’s pleas for protection of their children, judges send these vulnerable children into the custody, or court-ordered unsupervised visitation, with the dangerous parent. The children become suicidal, clinically depressed, and severely anorexic.

Some have died from starvation, neglect or a blunt physical assault at the hands of the abusive parent. The New York politicians were the first to expose the scandalously corrupt family courts in the 80s—and today are still championing this important cause.

Former Eastside Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and Upper Eastside Democratic Assembly woman Rebecca Seawright (District 76) spoke passionately last summer at an East Hampton fundraiser about the dire conditions facing mothers in the family courts. [Author Spearheads Drive to Investigate Family Court System After Suicide of Young Mother (westsidespirit.com)].

Maloney has spoken to members of NOW-NYS where she serves as president. Seawright has taken calls from grieving mothers in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere. Both Maloney and Seawright comprehend that this is a national issue of critical concern and must be addressed forthwith.

They follow in the footsteps of Manhattan Congressman Jerrold Nadler who, as an Assemblyman serving on the Judiciary Committee, spearheaded hearings into the atrocities of family court that caused mothers to lose their children by the droves to abusive and dangerous fathers. Those hearings drew prominent lawyers, mental health experts, and, most importantly, mothers from California, North Carolina, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Georgia and elsewhere. They flew into New York to testify at these landmark hearings. Assemblyman Oliver Koppell, who chaired the NYS Assembly Judiciary Committee at that time, was so overwhelmed with the number of mothers clamoring to have their stories placed on New York’s legislative hearing record that he opened up another full day to accommodate them.

Former Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger while serving as a City Council Member took to the steps of City Hall to hold a press conference on the torture and abuse of children at the hands of family court. Westsider reporter Karen Winner covered the event. In her article titled “Officials Say Abuse Case Review Due” (August 11, 1988, pp. 3), Winner reported on the devastation of family court where abused children are easily shoveled into the hands of the abusive parent in spite of the mother’s pleas for protection. Messinger urged an investigation by outside authorities as she pointed to a litany of abusive actions by the family courts that had placed children in peril.

Former Governor David A. Paterson, when serving in the New York State Senate, held a series of hearings into family court abuses where mothers were threatened with incarceration and fines when asking family court judges to protect their children from sexual and physical abuse by the substance-abusing fathers. He followed the case of an eight-year-old girl who landed in the hospital at the edge of death from severe starvation while living with the abusive father.

He summed up his views of family court telling Newsday, “this is the most serious indictment of government I’ve seen” (November 7, 1992, p. 21). With Maloney and Seawright taking up this issue at present, and piggybacking onto the forty-year history of the New York Democratic Party heavyweights who had done so earlier, there is hope. They can reach out to the Harris/Walz campaign to tap the “Mothers’ Vote” here in NY and across the country. Harris can play an essential part by calling the Department of Health and Human Services and the Justice Department to rescue the children trapped in a venal family court system. Her rescue of children will earn her victory in the November election for sure. But it will also earn her recognition in the annals of American history.

Amy Neustein, Ph.D. is the co-author of “From Madness to Mutiny: Why Mothers are Running from the Family Courts— And What Can be Done about It” to be published by Oxford University Press.