

## **Joint Statement in Support of A4442/S2917**

The 24-hour information cycle is dominated by the latest “breaking news,” each segment complemented by expert commentary – individuals offering perspective, predictions, and sometimes solutions on how to address the issue at hand. We write this as experts in sexual violence and child abuse prevention.

As the public is becoming increasingly aware, sexual abuse and violence often go unreported and even worse than that, disclosures are often ignored or dismissed by individuals and/or systems protecting their own interests. And, as high-profile cases relating to settlements and non-disclosure agreements gain increased attention, we are compelled to ensure that New Jersey protects some of our most vulnerable citizens – children.

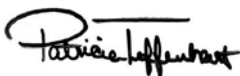
The American Association of University Women conducted a national survey in 2000 which found that an estimated 290,000 students experienced some sort of physical sexual abuse by a public school employee in the previous decade. Another major study, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, found that nearly 10 percent of U.S. public school students reported having been targeted with sexual attention by school employees.

In instances where these situations are shared with school administrators, they are often settled behind closed doors, finalized with a non-disclosure agreement barring either party from sharing information about the conduct. The result? [Released employees take jobs in new unsuspecting towns](#), their sexual abuse of children in one district kept a secret, allowing them to stealthily slip into the lives of a new community of innocent children.

The [New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#) and [Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey](#) are joining forces to protect against this from being standard practice here in New Jersey. **We are calling on all New Jersey legislators to sign-on in support of A4442/S2917**, which prohibits a school district, charter school, or contracted service provider holding a contract with a school district or charter school from employing a person serving in a position which involves regular contact with students unless the school district, charter school, or contracted service provider conducts a review of the employment history of the applicant by contacting former and current employers and requesting information regarding child abuse and sexual misconduct allegations.

We thank the legislators currently sponsoring this bill (Assemblymen Webber and O’Scanlon, Assemblywomen Muñoz and DeCroce, and Senators Pennacchio and Bucco) and are confident that as we draw attention to this issue, this bill will gain the bipartisan and community support it needs to move swiftly into law.

**The bottom line is that allowing schools to hide these crimes and allowing offenders to get another job and abuse more children has to stop.** While the vast majority of school teachers and other school employees are dedicated professionals to help our children learn and grow, a small percentage take advantage of their positions of power, gain the trust of students and use their access with youth to commit crimes of sexual abuse. This bill is a common-sense approach, which has passed unanimously in several other states, that can better protect our children from crimes that can devastate their success in education, health, and life’s future opportunities.



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