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Juvenile Sex Offender Legislation Passes Senate

HARRISBURG -- Senator David J. Brightbill (R-Lebanon), today announced that legislation designed to help ensure that serious juvenile sex offenders are not released while they remain a danger to the community passed the Senate unanimously, 49 to 0.

The legislation was proposed in response to the situation involving Brian Calabrese, who pleaded guilty in 1999 to rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and aggravated indecent assault in connection with the rape of a young girl. Calabrese was 17 at the time.

Earlier this year, it appeared that Calabrese would be released from incarceration on his 21st birthday, when the juvenile court system's jurisdiction over him expired. His release has been blocked by a civil commitment, but the situation revealed a shortcoming in the justice system.

Senate Bill 521 would authorize the county solicitor to seek an involuntary commitment of a sexually violent young adult who is "aging out" of the juvenile justice system. The commitment, which would be for a period of one year, would be reviewed annually and could last up to 10 years.

"This legislation would close a frightening loophole in the law," said Senator Brightbill.

Under this legislation, offenders would be placed in a specialized, secure treatment facility operated by the Department of Public Welfare. It was negotiated with a broad coalition of interest groups, including rape crisis advocates, Pennsylvania prosecutors and judges, mental health experts, the Sex Offender Assessment Board, and other members of the Rendell Administration.

This cooperative effort will result in Pennsylvania having a model for the nation, as no other state has a statute specifically designed to address the civil commitment of sexually violent young adults.

Representative Peter Zug (R-Myerstown) and Representative Mauree Gingrich (R-Palmyra) support Senate Bill 521 and plan to work for its passage in the state House.

"We're very pleased that Senate Bill 521 is moving forward, and that our local legislators are working together to make it happen," said Jenny Murphy-Shifflet, executive director of the Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center in Lebanon.

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