

# SPOTLIGHT ON GOVERNMENT

Correspondence & Commentary From Your Local, County, State & Federal Officials

## A Fundamental Job Of Government

Capitol  
Comments

Assemblyman Alex Sauickie



TRENTON - One of the differences between the political left and right is the view of the proper size and function of government, from the national to the state and to the local level. This has been at the heart of many debates I've heard since I joined the state Assembly.

The left generally favors a bigger role for the government to create a more significant social safety net, and to promote what they believe to be equitable outcomes. The right mostly seeks maximum freedom from government rules and mandates consistent with public safety, and believes the free market and individuals are better suited to make certain decisions than are government officials.

But one thing that does – and should – unite the two sides of the political divide is the desire to protect those who cannot protect themselves. It's an unfortunate fact of life that some are born without the ability to look out for their own welfare, and others encounter some circumstance that renders them that way, or simply reach that state as a result of old age.

Today I'd like to focus on the first group, who need care and supervision for their entire lives. Even the best par-

ents can only do so much for a child who is born with a debilitating condition, including severe autism among others.

All people of goodwill want the best life possible for people who need constant care and protection. All are rightly outraged when they are neglected or abused, and the Legislature has a history of bipartisan, unanimous votes when seeking to improve protections for them.

In 2010, a law was enacted to create the Central Registry of Offenders Against Individuals with Developmental Disabilities. The registry is intended to help protect such people by identifying caregivers who have wrongfully caused them injury. It passed unanimously in the Senate and the Assembly.

In 2015, another law was passed to create new criminal offenses for endangering another person. The law established escalating penalties for those who recklessly create a substantial risk of bodily injury, knowingly create that risk, or knowingly create a substantial risk of death.

That law upgrades each offense if the victim has a developmental disability, creating even higher penalties. It also passed unanimously in both houses of the Legislature.

In 2017, the Legislature once again moved to increase protections for vulnerable people, although it took years of effort to get it done. Very sadly, it was a tragic true story that stirred action.

Stephen Komninios was a 22-year-old man with intellectual disabilities, a full fellow citizen who needed and deserved proper care in a group home. He didn't get it.

For years, Stephen suffered abuse from which he was unable to protect himself. Finally, against medical direction, a caregiver left him unsupervised one day in 2007, and Stephen choked to death.

Stephen's experience propelled his father, Thomas Komninios, into years of advocacy along with other families and supportive lawmakers who sought stronger protections for vulnerable adults in state-funded or regulated programs. These reforms, called Stephen Komninios Law, passed unanimously in both houses and was signed into law in 2017.

Still, incidents of severe abuse and neglect continue to be reported. They are documented in annual reports by the man with what must be the longest title in New Jersey state government.

Paul Aronsohn, Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families, has been dedicated to that job since 2018. He is a great advocate who does important work, but in my opinion the state hasn't given his office the kind of power needed to drive sufficient change.

Honestly, I didn't even know of that office until I was visited by a woman named Yana who told me the story of her daughter, who suffered neglect and abuse in a group home. What I heard from her had me dumbfounded, enraged

and deeply saddened all at the same time.

It's an important story, but I won't repeat it here. You can read that and other shocking stories, as well as ideas for reform, in a series of articles about a year-long investigation into group homes by *northjersey.com* called "Hidden at Home."

Now that I'm connected with Paul, Yana and other advocates, I hope to develop some reforms that will be effective and that can also get enough support to pass in the Legislature. Everyone wants to protect these vulnerable citizens, but there's disagreement on how to do it and whether there will be unintended consequences from cracking down too hard.

The state Senate has moved some related legislation, and deserves some credit for that even though I agree with some advocates that we can do better. The Assembly hasn't done anything on this issue recently that I'm aware of.

I hope to change that. There is much that can be done to increase family involvement, require more transparency from group homes, provide better staff training, and reform how investigations of mistreatment are conducted.

We have to protect those who can't protect themselves.

*Alex Sauickie is a life-long Jackson resident who represents his home town and 12 other towns in the State Assembly. Follow him on Facebook (/AssemblymanAlex) and on Instagram (@AssemblymanAlex), or visit his website at AssemblymanAlex.com.*

## Senators Warn Against New Federal Judge For NJ

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Comments

Senator Andy Kim



WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Andy Kim (D-NJ) and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, issued the following statement:

"Emil Bove's confirmation to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit is a blow to the guiding principles of judicial independence and impartiality. During his confirmation process, it became clear that Bove has a contempt for both. His professional record is marred by a pattern of abusive behavior, ethical breaches, and

disdain for the norms of judicial integrity. These transgressions have drawn the condemnation of judges, members of the legal community, and even his peers.

"Throughout this process, it became clear that our Republican colleagues had no interest in a thorough or fair examination of his record. They repeatedly dismissed credible evidence and even disparaged multiple whistleblowers who risked their professional reputation to come forward with concrete proof of misconduct. An honest evaluation of his record would lead any person to conclude that Emil Bove should be nowhere near the federal bench.

"The people of New Jersey deserve a federal judge who will uphold the rule of

law, remain immune from undue influence, and preserve and secure justice for all. And the people of America deserve Senators who honor their constitutional duty to rigorously scrutinize and responsibly consent to judicial nominations. Today, neither of those things happened. New Jersey will bear the burden of Senate Republicans' cowardice."

The Facts About Emil Bove:

- 75 former state and federal judges, leaders within the conservative legal establishment, and hundreds of former DOJ attorneys have warned about the dangers of his nomination.
- A corroborated allegation from a whistleblower revealed that Bove directed attorneys to defy a court order.
- Bove misled lawmakers about his role in the Justice Department's dismissal of NYC

Mayor Eric Adams' federal indictment.

- Federal criminal defense lawyers described Bove as a "drunk driver" as a prosecutor.
- Bove was involved in the Justice Department's withholding of the Epstein files.
- An editorial in the Philadelphia Inquirer stated that Bove is "one person who has no business working in the federal government, let alone receiving a lifetime appointment as a federal judge."
- Columnists in the Times Union and The New York Times have warned Bove is "dangerous" and a "loyalist," respectively.
- New Jersey's Tom Moran stated, Bove is "Trump's worst nomination yet."
- Meanwhile The Wall Street Journal's editorial board wrote, Bove's reputation "is as a smashmouth partisan who wields the law as a weapon."