

Cuomo is right to protect the developmentally disabled

Too many in NY are being abused and neglected

1:26 AM, May. 10, 2012 |

[Comments](#)

Gov. Andrew Cuomo is sending a forceful and needed message across New York state that he has no tolerance for those who would abuse the developmentally disabled.

This week the governor unveiled unprecedented legislation that provides solid protections to an estimated 1 million disabled New Yorkers. The state Legislature should get behind Cuomo and adopt his proposals before adjourning next month.

As the tragic initial burial of Sally Green in Monroe County without notification of her next of kin showed, people with disabilities — even in death — too often aren't viewed as individuals with rights like everyone else. Cuomo correctly calls their mistreatment a civil rights issue. "People deserve fairness; people deserve justice — that's what this initiative is all about," the governor said earlier this week in announcing his proposed protections.

Fairness is hardly what this population is getting based on findings released this week by Clarence Sundram, the first chief of the state Commission on Quality of Care. The report noted significant impediments

in state statutes that subjected the developmentally disabled to “needless risk of harm.”

That point was underscored Wednesday when the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities announced that its own investigation found cause to fire 200 state employees implicated in the abuse of people with disabilities. A *New York Times* series earlier revealed abuses of group home residents by state workers.

Foremost under Cuomo’s proposal, which he tagged as his No. 1 priority for the remainder of the 2012 regular session, is creation of a new state entity that would oversee investigations, and in some instances prosecute cases of abuse and neglect. Currently OPWDD and other agencies serving the disabled such as the Department of Health and Office of Mental Health are allowed to self police.

Now the state Legislature must act.