

***** MEDIA ADVISORY*****

Medical Students Advocate Against Health Professional Participation in Torture

Tuesday May 18 Advocacy Day in Albany in Support of Gottfried-Duane Bill, the First of its Kind in the Nation

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NEW YORK – Wearing the white coats of their future profession, a group of medical students joined by medical educators and other health professionals will descend on Albany next **Tuesday, May 18** to meet with lawmakers and advocate for passage of historic legislation prohibiting the participation of health professionals in the torture and improper treatment of prisoners.

Assembly Bill A-6665-B (introduced by Assemblyman Richard Gottfried) & **Senate Bill S-4495-A** (introduced by Sen. Tom Duane) is the first legislation in the United States that would reinforce and strengthen existing ethical and legal responsibilities by explicitly prohibiting doctors and other health professionals licensed in the state from assisting in torture, interrogations, and prisoner abuse. Furthermore, the legislation provides health professionals with strong legal protection to resist and report any participation in acts of torture and abuse.

“Preventing medical participation in torture is crucial to our profession’s moral integrity,” said Dr. Allen Keller, Associate Professor of Medicine at New York University School of Medicine and Director of the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture. “It is appropriate that future health professionals are not only reminding us of this but leading the way.”

Hana Akselrod, a second-year medical student at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in Manhattan and a leader in the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), said that she and her fellow students were deeply disturbed by well-documented reports of medical participation (including physicians and psychologists) in human rights abuses, and by the subsequent erosion of faith in her profession. “As future doctors, we are committed to restoring trust in our profession and respect for the rule of law,” Akselrod said. “We look forward to garnering additional support for the bill and to raising awareness about this critical ethical and human rights issue.”

Added Dr. Keller: “This bill demonstrates leadership in New York as well as nationally and internationally. It will help prevent torture in the future and will hold health professionals accountable if they participate in prisoner or detainee abuse.”

Dr. Keller is a leading advocate for the bill, along with **Physicians for Human Rights**, the **Center for Constitutional Rights** and the **New York Coalition against Torture**. Other supporters of the bill include the **New York State Psychological Association**, the New York chapters of the **American College of Physicians** and the **Nurses Association**, and the **American Medical Students Association**.

Dr. Keller and participating students will be available for interview on **Tuesday May 18 between 8:00 and 9:45 a.m. in Room 711 of the Legislative Office Building**. Individual interviews can also be arranged in advance or at other times as requested, schedule permitting.

WHO: Dr. Allen Keller, Associate Professor of Medicine, NYU School of Medicine, Director of the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture (www.survivorsoftorture.org), accompanied by a group of medical students from Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, Albany Medical College and New York University.

WHAT: Anti-torture Advocacy Day to urge passage of the first-ever bill to explicitly address health professional participation in torture.

WHERE/WHEN: Room 711, Tuesday May 18, Legislative Office Building (8:00am-9:45 am) and other times before or after as requested.

BACKGROUND:

Legislation has been proposed in New York State by Assemblyman Richard Gottfried and Senator Tom Duane which would prohibit the participation of health care professionals in torture and improper treatment of prisoners. This bill is a needed step to insure that the well-documented complicity and direct participation of physicians and other health professionals at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere will not be repeated.

The Gottfried/Duane bill:

- Confirms that NY-licensed health professionals' duty to do no harm applies to their professional relationships with all patients and with all employers;
- Reaffirms that health professionals licensed in New York are prohibited from involvement in torture or other abuse of prisoners, wherever that abuse takes place;
- Removes NY-licensed health professionals from interrogations; and
- Helps NY-licensed health professionals resist unlawful orders that could place them at risk of criminal prosecution and civil damages lawsuits.

The text of the bill is online at <http://whenhealersharm.org/pass-ny-anti-torture-bill>

For further information, including a list of organizations endorsing the bill, please visit:

www.stoptortureny.org
www.whenhealersharm.org

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