



# Accused Astoria Park Rapist On The Loose

BY JOHN TOSCANO

Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr. issued a warning last week that a suspected pedophile accused of sexually assaulting a 9-year-old girl in Astoria Park last August has jumped bail and is now being sought by police.

The Astoria lawmaker, who lives only yards away from the park and is the father of two young girls, expressed further concern that the suspect, Peter Belegrinos, reportedly is off his medication and police believe that could make him dangerous.

The television station NY1 also reported that Belegrinos, according to family members, "is not taking prescribed medication and they are afraid of what he is capable of doing."

"This monster is roaming around free and unmonitored," Vallone declared angrily. "Parents have to keep an eye on their children until this predator is behind bars. The parents need to know the streets in the area aren't safe for children. It's not enough that they know where their children are right now. Keep an eye on your kids until this animal is back in his cage."

Belegrinos, who was under \$50,000 bail, had been due to appear in court on Monday, January 23, in connection with the vicious sexual assault on the 9-year-old girl, but did not appear.

When the suspect was freed on bail, Vallone had blasted the judge's decision and warned that Belegrinos would eventually flee.

Vallone (D-Astoria), an attorney, declared: "The evidence is so overwhelming that the defendant should have been remanded. This guy [allegedly] sexually abused and then viciously assaulted a 9-year-old girl, yet he only faces a maximum of seven years in jail for this crime."

The NY1 report, explaining how the bail was set, said the Office of Court Administration said it did what it could based on the law. "The judge set bail based on the statutory elements that the court must consider. For most people, including the defendant, \$50,000 is a great deal of money. It is important to remember that bail cannot be used for preventive detention or punitive reasons," a statement from the office as quoted in the NY1 report, said.

But Vallone, who is chairman of the council Public Safety Committee, said there must be tougher, longer sentences in order to keep pedophiles in jail.

"Albany needs to move immediately and enact something similar to the Lunsford Act in Florida, where if you sexually assault a child, you are facing a minimum of 25 years to life. That's what [Belegrinos] should be facing, not seven years in jail," Vallone said.

Vallone had drafted a resolution some time ago calling for New York state to follow Florida's lead and enact a law similar to the Lunsford Act, which impris-



ons first-time offenders for 25 years to life and second-time offenders for life.

The lawmaker said that last week Governor George Pataki introduced legislation that would give New York state a version of the Lunsford Act. At the same time, Pataki signed other legislation into law which would strengthen Megan's Law by mandating that the worst sexual offenders would have their names in a state registry for convicted sex offenders for life, and others would have their names kept in the registry longer than previously.

Vallone pointed out, "Registration, electronic monitoring and housing restrictions are all positive steps but they can only do so much to protect our children. The real answer is to lock these animals in cages for as long as possible."

This could be done under a civil commitment bill which keeps high-risk offenders off the street.

The state senate has passed such a bill under the sponsorship of Senator Serphin Maltese (R-C, Middle

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