



The families of the four victims killed in the 2015 Cutchogue limo crash and their supporters gather in Smithtown on Sunday to lobby for increased limo safety regulations.

Rallying for limo safety

Crash victims' families: Tougher regulations vital

BY VERA CHINESE
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The families of the women involved in a fatal 2015 limousine crash on the North Fork and their supporters rallied on Sunday, urging state lawmakers to include limousine safety regulations in the 2019-20 state budget.

Families of the crash victims, Suffolk County and Town of Smithtown officials and other supporters gathered at Central

Road in Smithtown Sunday, which was dedicated last year as LABS Lane, to film a video lobbying for stricter oversight of the limo industry. LABS is an acronym for the first initials of victims Lauren Baruch, 24, and Britney Schulman, 23, both of Smithtown, Amy Grabina, 23, of Commack, and Stephanie Belli, 23, of Kings Park, who were killed in the Cutchogue crash during a July 2015 winery tour.

Supporters wore buttons bearing the images of the eight victims, who include Olga Lipets, Melissa Crai, Alicia Arundel and Joelle DiMonte, who survived the crash. Others held signs asking lawmakers to remember the Cutchogue

crash, as well as an October 2018 limo crash in upstate Schoharie that killed 20.

"Most people are taking limousines so they believe they are going to be safe," said Steve Baruch, father of Lauren Baruch. "The fact of the matter is limousines, in general, are not."

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has several measures to deal with the limousine safety issue in his proposal for the fiscal 2019-20 state budget due to be passed by April 1. Cuomo's budget would increase criminal and civil penalties for putting unsafe limousines on the road. The package also would boost penalties for limos longer than

18 feet that make U-turns.

The Assembly and Senate removed most of the policy initiatives in Cuomo's package in their own budget proposals.

"Saving lives cannot wait, and we hope the Legislature agrees," a Cuomo spokesman said in an email.

Other lawmakers told Newsday this week that such issues are better handled legislatively, with hearings and public debate.

"The Senate Majority has been clear that we support additional limousine safety regulations and will work with our partners in government, as well as stakeholders, to take appropriate and timely action," a Sen-

ate Majority spokesman said in an email on Sunday.

Baruch and others cited the need for commercial driver's licenses for limousine drivers, seat belt requirements and prohibiting limos from making U-turns as critical components to be included. The video made Sunday will be shared on social media and sent to Albany lawmakers imploring them to include the measures in the final budget deal, advocates said.

If their call isn't heeded, "it [the regulations] will get watered down to the point where the laws that need to be in there won't be included," said Paul Schulman, of Smithtown, father of Brittny Schulman.

Cuomo renews plea to enact permanent property tax cap

BY KRISTOPHER J. BROOKS
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Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo gave a last-minute plea to state lawmakers Sunday in New Hyde Park, urging them to pass a budget that includes a permanent property tax cap.

Joined by several Long Island Democrats, Cuomo lifted his right hand to a crowd assembled at Clinton G. Martin Park.

"This hand will never sign a budget that doesn't have a per-

manent property tax cap," he said.

Several Democratic state and local lawmakers, including Nassau and Suffolk executives Laura Curran and Steve Bellone, State Sen. Anna Kaplan and Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen, all said a permanent tax cap will help middle-class Long Island families keep more of their income.

Nassau is one of three New York counties — along with Rockland and Westchester —

with the highest property taxes in the state. Westchester homeowners paid on average \$17,179 in 2017 while Rockland residents paid \$12,924 and Nassau paid \$11,415, according to a 2018 study from California-based property database firm Attom Data Solutions.

Curran said Long Islanders have saved more than \$8 billion in taxes since the cap was first enacted in 2012.

The cap has saved New Yorkers statewide more than \$24 billion, Cuomo administration offi-

cialists have said.

Dix Hills resident Tracey Edwards, NAACP Long Island regional director, said the tax cap has saved her household about \$25,000 over the past seven years. A permanent cap would eventually mean \$160,000 in savings, Edwards said.

"I can tell you firsthand, for years, the [property] taxes have went up and up and seemingly out of control," Edwards said. "This is not just about my family. It's about every family that owns a home on Long Island

and across the state."

The tax cap provision, which limits the annual percentage increase in taxes a local government or school district can levy to roughly 2 percent, is set to expire next year.

The State Senate already passed a permanent tax cap 52-8 earlier this year and the measure now awaits the State Assembly.

Sunday marked the third time in two weeks Cuomo has visited Long Island to push for the permanent tax cap.