



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT
A. 6665 (Gottfried) S. 4495 (Duane)

February 22, 2010

An Act to amend the public health law, the education law and the labor law, in relation to prohibiting participation in torture and improper treatment of prisoners by health care professionals.

Human Rights First builds respect for human rights to stem intolerance, tyranny, and violence and to help ensure the dignity to which everyone is entitled under the law. We work to ensure a single standard of humane treatment by the United States for all terrorist suspects and armed conflict detainees and to ensure U.S. adherence to international treaty obligations prohibiting torture and ill-treatment.

In a country like the United States, where states, as well as the federal government, have the power and responsibility to make laws, it is vital that states recognize their role to implement international human rights treaty obligations. We therefore support the Gottfried-Duane Bill amending the public health law to prohibit health professionals licensed in New York State from participation in torture or abuse of prisoners.

It has become evident in recent years that health care professionals have assisted the U.S. government and military in using torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in overseas prisons. The Gottfried-Duane Bill would provide medical professionals with necessary legal protection to resist orders or coercion to participate in acts of torture or abuse of prisoners. This legislation is a model for other states to follow as a means of fulfilling their obligations under international law to prohibit torture, a crime for which all perpetrators must be held accountable under current U.S. law and international treaties.

Medical health professionals deserve state support through legislation to uphold the basic principals of medical ethics, which include compassion and respect for human rights and dignity. Every state has an obligation to address the role that health care professionals who are licensed in the state have with respect to the treatment of prisoners. As an organization dedicated to addressing the abuses that arise from certain U.S. counterterrorism measures, Human Rights First urges passage of the Gottfried-Duane Bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabor Rona".

Gabor Rona
International Legal Director,
Human Rights First