

## Commentary: Gov. Hochul, sign the Child-Sensitive Arrest Bill

*Police need clear guidelines, tools and training to reduce the harm children can endure when they see a parent being arrested.*

By BRENDAN COX and RAYMOND RODRIGUEZ | December 11, 2024



Credit:  
Getty Images.  
kali9/Getty Images

A police chief and a young man who watched his father get arrested may seem unlikely allies, but our shared experiences have united us with a common purpose. One of us recently returned to lead the Albany Police Department, and the other was just 8 years old when he saw his father handcuffed in front of him. Today, we stand united in urging Gov. Kathy Hochul to sign the Child-Sensitive Arrest Bill, which is now awaiting her signature.

This bill addresses the trauma children endure when they witness a parent being arrested, equipping law enforcement with clear guidelines, tools and training to reduce this harm. While it may be hard to imagine the stress, fear and confusion a child feels at this moment, these situations are far too common. Thousands of children across the state are present during the arrest of a parent each year for non-child-related reasons, which could include anything from shoplifting to a suspended license. Without a thoughtful approach, these encounters can leave deep emotional scars and foster a lasting distrust of law enforcement.

Police officers often face the challenge of interacting with children in complex and emotionally charged

situations. They deserve the latest tools and training to navigate these moments effectively. The Child-Sensitive Arrest Bill provides a straightforward, structured process to guide officers, helping them better understand and support children during these encounters. While awareness of the need for such policies is growing nationwide, most police departments still lack formal protocols or training. This means that too often, children are left to face these traumatic experiences without the care and consideration they need, and officers are left wondering if they did the right thing and experiencing secondary trauma.

One of us led Albany's police department. Ten years ago, I realized that simply saying, "We care about kids" wasn't enough. We needed a formal policy and proper training to ensure that officers were equipped to interact with children when a parent was arrested. Albany became the first department in New York to implement these measures, making a significant difference — not just for the children but for the officers involved. Officers felt better prepared, and the community felt more supported.

Unfortunately, Albany's approach remains the exception, not the rule.

New York's Division of Criminal Justice Services now requires accredited police departments to adopt written policies and provide training on these situations. However, some departments are unaccredited, leaving many children without the protections they deserve.

One of us was that 8-year-old boy watching his father being taken away. For me, this issue is deeply personal. That moment changed me in ways I didn't fully understand at the time. Years later, I shared my story with then-Sen. Velmanette Montgomery, who championed the original bill. I chose to speak out because I didn't want another child to go through what I did. We can't allow other children to endure the trauma I experienced.

Passing this bill won't just reduce harm to children; it will also benefit officers and help strengthen community-police relations.

For both of us, the Child-Sensitive Arrest Bill is more than a policy — it's a powerful statement that New York prioritizes the well-being of its children, even in the most difficult circumstances. By signing this bill, Gov. Hochul can set a new standard for how law enforcement interacts with children, providing officers with the tools they need to approach these moments with care and compassion.

This is a moment to show leadership, strengthen trust between police and communities, and ensure that no child carries unnecessary trauma from witnessing a parent's arrest. Gov. Hochul, we urge you to take this vital step forward. Together, we can make New York a leader in protecting our most vulnerable.

*Brendan Cox is chief of the Albany Police Department. Raymond Rodriguez inspired the Child-Sensitive Arrest Bill, also known as Raymond's Bill.*

Link to original story at Times Union:

<https://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/commentary-gov-hochul-sign-child-sensitive-19971395.php>