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**S**TATE Sen. David Paterson, the Harlem Democrat, is about to introduce special legislation for a task force to investigate the case of Sherry Neustein-Orbach, the 12-year-old girl at the center of a bitter sexual-molestation dispute whose survival is believed to be in serious jeopardy.

It's about time. If ever a case cries out for a thorough, impartial investigation, this is it. This little girl's fate has been buried beneath so many layers and years of suspect legal maneuvers, government secrecy and private manipulation that it is time someone broke it open to public scrutiny.

## State pol acts to bare tale of horror

Sherry Neustein's anguished life has been probed in hearings by Sen. Paterson and former Assemblyman Jerrold Nadler. It has been investigated by children's organizations and exposed in scores of media outlets. The verdict is virtually unanimous: The child was cruelly removed

without good cause from the custody of her caring mother, Dr. Amy Neustein, and placed in dire peril in the custody of her accused molester, her father. Sherry's father denies all the charges and the courts have upheld his position. However, since he has had care of Sherry, her physical and mental health have deteriorated so alarmingly that one examining physician, Dr. Jeffrey Birnbaum, described her as the "most emaciated child" he had ever seen. Suffering from severe anorexia and depression, Sherry last summer lost 11 pounds, plunging her weight to 69 pounds. At her age, she should weigh about 106 pounds.

The most astonishing aspect of this case is that Dr. Neustein, fearful for her daughter's life, rushed Sherry to the hospital for emergency medical care in defiance of a court order three years ago. Judge Leon Deutsch, incredibly, punished Dr. Neustein for her act of mercy by stripping her of all visitation rights. Dr. Neustein has not seen Sherry since. It is decisions such as these that prompted Children's Rights of America Inc. to describe the child's plight as the "biggest travesty of justice" it has ever encountered.

So Sen. Paterson is moving to bust it wide open after years of shady dealing, suspect court decisions and repeated acts of malfeasance. Sen. Paterson wants the task force to have wide subpoena powers to grill scores of people who have made decisions on Sherry Neustein's fate —

hospital, Legal Aid, school, social workers, foster agencies, lawyers, district attorneys.

## 'Travesty of justice' menaces girl's life

"This is a frightening case," Sen. Paterson said yesterday. "The bias and vitriolic contempt for the welfare of this child reflects a brazen conduct toward many parents and children. Every level of government has had an opportunity to do something in this case, and they have done nothing. The child's development underwent a dramatic change at 6 years, which is very

rare. Something has happened to this little girl."

Sen. Paterson then made a chilling observation. He said: "The cover-up of this tragedy is such that those who have taken part in it may have an interest in seeing the child die. As long as she is alive, the prospect of discovery remains."

The hour is late for Sherry Neustein. Sen. Paterson's task force cannot begin its work a minute too soon.