



The amphitheater in Rochester’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park was renamed “Daniel Prude Square.” Prude died after a 2020 encounter with Rochester police, prompting a push for legislation on how to respond to mental health and substance abuse crises. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE /ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

# Momentum in Albany builds for Daniel’s Law

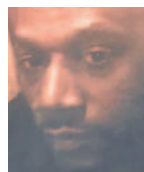
Bill seeks to shift crisis response away from police to special teams

**Chris McKenna**

New York State Team | USA TODAY NETWORK

The upcoming anniversary of Daniel Prude’s death after a 2020 encounter with Rochester police has prompted a renewed push for legislation to change how New Yorkers in the throes of a mental health or substance abuse crisis are treated.

Lawmakers proposed a bill named for Prude in 2021 that would shift the response to those emergencies



**Prude**

from police officers to teams of emergency medical workers and trained peers. The proposal has remained in committee without a vote in Albany for three legislative sessions and is pending again in its fourth year.

This week, supporters of Daniel’s Law are staging a series of rallies, vigils and public talks to urge state lawmakers and Gov. Kathy Hochul to enact the bill and include funding for a pilot program in the state budget now under negotiation. Those events include a vigil at 6 p.m. on Saturday at the

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# Prude

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amphitheater in Rochester's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park, which was renamed "Daniel Prude Square."

That final vigil in the weeklong campaign will take place four years to the day after Prude's death at age 41.

## What are the bill's chances of passing?

The bill's supporters are optimistic this year because both the Senate and Assembly have proposed budgeting \$2 million for a pilot program testing the sort of emergency response outlined in Daniel's Law.

"Prioritizing compassion over criminalization means healthier, safer communities," Sen. Samra Brouk, a Rochester Democrat who sponsored

the bill, said in a post on X celebrating the potential funding.

In an interview on Tuesday, Brouk said the funds "would be a really big step forward" for the broader legislative push, following last year's creation of a state task force tied to the pending bill. She said the \$2 million could be used to support emergency response teams in multiple areas of New York, including some that already follow the model and de-escalation principles outlined in her bill. The pilot's goal is to test how well those systems work and thereby "accelerate the work of the task force," so Daniel's Law can be enacted, Brouk said.

## What happened in 2020?

Prude was behaving erratically when his brother called 911 early one morning in March

2020. Officers found him walking naked in the street and placed a "spit hood" over his head after he spat, holding his covered face to the ground for more than two minutes until he stopped breathing. Prude died a week later at Strong Memorial Hospital after being taken off life support.

The Monroe County medical examiner later determined he had died from complications from asphyxia and ruled his

death a homicide. Toxicology tests found a low level of the drug PCP - also known as angel dust - in his blood.

Protests over Prude's death erupted after police body-cam videos of his arrest were released in September 2020, nearly five months afterward. That outrage came in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and in the midst of nationwide protests over Floyd's death, adding

Prude's case to the push for police reforms and racial justice. Anger over Prude's death and the city's attempt to conceal it lingered long afterward, leading to the firing of Police Chief La'Ron Singleton and contributing to the ouster of Mayor Lovely Warren. In 2022, Roch-

ester agreed to pay Prude's family \$12 million to settle a wrongful-death lawsuit against the city.

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