

Newsday 12/11/06

# DA's new flex time unit

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Nassau's new Early Case Assessment Bureau is more than just an opportunity for prosecutors to look at cases sooner — for District Attorney Kathleen Rice, it is a chance to redeem herself to some of the people she angered when she eliminated a dozen part-time positions earlier this year.

The new bureau, which will be open from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. seven days a week, will give people who need to work flexible or part-time hours a place where they can do that, Rice said. It is a plan Rice discussed even as she was eliminating the other positions.

"This worked out great with hours," said prosecutor Melissa Morrone, who just had her second child and is working three 12-hour days a week in the bureau, leaving her four days a week at home with her kids.

But Elaine Avery, president of the New York Women's Bar Association, who spoke out strongly against Rice when she told

part-timers to come back full-time or leave this summer, said the new positions don't make up for what's been done.

"She gave the people who were in the office — seasoned attorneys — an ultimatum," Avery said. "Now these people are being offered what was taken away from the people who were there all along."

Deborah Epstein Henry, president of Pennsylvania-based Flex-Time Lawyers, which consults with lawyers and law firms on how to retain women, said it's great that Rice is creating part-time and flexible work hours. But she said part-time employees should be able to work in all parts of the district attorney's office, not just one bureau.

"You can't just create pink ghettos for women and have them in one designated area," Henry said. "Creative solutions can be found that do not negatively impact the obligation of a prosecutor to uphold the law."

Rice said the part-time positions that she eliminated

weren't practical, because prosecutors need to be available at regular hours to appear in court and meet with police and other witnesses.

"I have believed in non-traditional hours from day one, but the previous system was not working for the public and the prosecutors here in this office," Rice said. "This provides a higher quality product to taxpayers while also allowing for flexible schedules."

She said with the new bureau, she hopes Nassau will offer the most flexibility for parents of any local district attorney's office.

Suffolk currently has two part-timers and Queens employs up to 10 part-time workers at any given time. Many, if not all, of the 20 prosecutors in the Nassau bureau will be working flexible or part-time schedules.

"I'm very confident that we are going to have the most modern approach for people who need to have their lives accommodated at certain times," Rice said.