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January 11, 2017
The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

I want to thank you for taking a big and brave stance on this critical issue. As a former fashion model and actress turned author, mental health advocate and ambassador, I am passionate about making significant changes for the greater good of the public. Child sexual abuse is an issue that I understand from three different angles: personal, educational, and policy. Growing up, I was sexually abused by a male figure in my home at age 8, and by my mother from the ages of 9 to 13, until the police removed me and sent me to live with my dad. As a result, I struggled for over seventeen years with psychosis, depression, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, addictions, PTSD, and more, and carried those issues into my modeling career, until I nearly died from anorexia nervosa. At the height of my career, my mother died, and I had to make the decision to walk away from it all and choose recovery. It was then that I uncovered the sexual abuse; I had repressed the memories for nearly 19 years. I was able to recover from my mental illnesses, but the trauma from child sexual abuse has significantly impacted my life in every way imaginable. Most people do not recover, however, and they do not have access to therapists who specialize in trauma. As a voice for the children and someone who has spent the past five years fighting for the rights of the people, I fully support S809, The Omnibus Child Victims Act, which seeks to eliminate New York's Statute of Limitations for child sexual abuse in criminal court and civil court, and gives adult victims a year in which they can sue their abusers and the institutions that facilitated their abuse.

Child sexual abuse is an epidemic, affecting more than 45,000,000 people in the United States, and 43,000 kids in New York every year, according to the CDC. One of my roles, as an Executive Board Member of Peaceful Hearts Foundation, a national child sexual abuse nonprofit, is to ensure that I educate the public, help to prevent abuse, and provide trauma-informed advocacy in every state, so that those numbers are eliminated. Let's look at it this way: one in five of every person you meet, every day, has been sexually abused.

I'd like to discuss this from a policy perspective. Last year I worked on AB 2539 with Assemblymember Marc Levine in California, which addressed the need for workplace protections and health standards for fashion models. One of the issues that repeatedly came up was the sexual abuse and harassment that models underwent, and let's not forget that the NY fashion industry often hires and glorifies pedophiles. Minors get into the industry, like I did, on average at 14, 15, and 16, and are subjected to sexual favors in the exchange for promises of lucrative careers. This is not only illegal, but most of them will never receive adequate pay and employee benefits because the industry is not currently regulated. When I looked at New York's current SOL law, I was mortified. It does not protect children, it protects predators. Only 1 in 10 of child sexual predators will ever see a day behind bars, which means that 90% of them are currently roaming the streets, abusing more kids. Studies show that one child sexual abuser, on average, abuses 50-100 children. And while the public perceives child sexual predators to be notorious monsters, most of the time, they are mothers, fathers, teachers, priests -- people that children trust. The Omnibus Child Victims Act is critical, not only for those working in the fashion industry, but children everywhere. Without it laws like Megan's Law and Child Safety Zones cannot work because abusers do not get identified. In my home state, California, we identified 300 abusers when we passed similar legislation.

Finally, I agree with your recently proposed free college tuition plan for young New Yorkers, however, I challenge you to look at the bigger picture here. What is the use in sending young people to college for free when child sexual trauma has been linked to learning disabilities and mental illnesses such as depression, suicide, eating disorders and more, all of which greatly impacts a child's ability to focus in school, and carries an average lifetime fiscal impact of \$210,000? We cannot ignore these issues any longer, but instead, must take action in the interest of our children if we want to strengthen New Yorkers, the nation and the world as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nikki DuBose". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Nikki DuBose
Executive Board Member, Peaceful Hearts Foundation