

# Newsday

## LONG ISLAND

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# Finally, Speed Limit Cut

## Race called a factor in town's delay to act after two deaths

By Joseph Mallia

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Two Uniondale boys, one black and one Hispanic, died more than a year ago after they were hit by cars near their schools.

Yesterday, Hempstead Town reduced speed limits near one boy's school, as it continues to study changes at the other's.

At a Town Hall meeting yesterday, Nassau Legis. Patrick Williams (D-Uniondale), charged the all-white Republican majority on the town board with "gross neglect" and racial bias for waiting that long after the deaths of Kryston Batson, 12, and Luis Hernandez, 11. "I am convinced and ashamed to admit that the lack of urgency is due to one fact — that Kryston and Luis lived in a minority community," he said.

The town yesterday lowered speed limits from 40 mph to 20 mph on Jerusalem Avenue near Turtle Hook Junior High School, which Batson attended.

Supervisor Richard Guardino denied the delay was due to racial bias, and blamed it on county officials under Thomas Gulotta, the former Republican executive, for failing to act on the town's requests.

"We conducted a year-long campaign to request that the Nassau County Police Department reconsid-

er its recommendation last year that a school speed zone was not warranted," Guardino said.

The town and the county each said it was the other's responsibility. One county source said the delay was caused by a feud between rival Republicans, pitting Gulotta's staff against the town government, which is loyal to Nassau GOP chairman Joseph Mondello. Also, the county and town were hesitant to accept responsibility for the speed limits, because they may face legal liability in the children's deaths.

Dorothy Goosby, Hempstead's only black, and only Democratic, board member, said she helped end the impasse by enlisting the new county executive, a Democrat: "I had to call Tom Suozzi and he took care of it."

The speed-limit change came after a weeklong public relations blitz. Williams scheduled a protest rally. Goosby announced a public hearing. Attorney Fred Brewington filed a \$15 million wrongful-death lawsuit on behalf of the Batson family.

"It took the death of a child to make them stand up and take notice, and then it took a lawsuit to make them open their eyes," Brewington said.

Marie Catanese of Uniondale told the board its job is only half done: now it should reduce the speed limit near Northern Parkway School where, on Feb. 15, 2001, Luis Hernandez was fatally injured.