



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Governor Signs Ritchie Bill to Boost Eee Prevention

PATTY RITCHIE December 18, 2014

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### **Landmark New Law Latest in Effort to Combat the Disease That's Claimed Lives in CNY; Focuses Health Experts on Finding Vaccine**

State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced that the Governor has signed into law her bill to help speed the discovery of potentially life-saving vaccines for deadly diseases including Eastern Equine Encephalitis, the mosquito-borne virus that's claimed five lives in Oswego County and Central New York.

The measure (S.2115), which passed both houses of the Legislature with overwhelming bipartisan support, creates a new "21<sup>st</sup> Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination and Reduction" within the state Department of Health.

Comprising experts in diseases, infection and public health, the group is tasked with identifying obstacles that may be preventing development of effective vaccines for EEE and other diseases, including West Nile Virus, Lyme disease, tuberculosis and more.

The group's efforts are being funded with \$100,000 that Senator Ritchie secured in this year's State Budget, and is to report its findings by the end of the next year, and in subsequent years.

"The creation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination puts our state on the path to finding vaccines to stop EEE and these other diseases by tapping into a wide expanse of resources and research, including experts in other states, the military and around the globe," said Senator Ritchie.

"As with the recent discovery of Ebola in New York, we've seen that state officials and health experts are well equipped to respond to the challenges posed by serious infectious diseases, and that's why we are turning to them once again to help protect public health and safety," Senator Ritchie said.

"From Lyme Disease to EEE, deadly viruses are becoming increasingly more prevalent across our state," said Senate Health Committee Chair Kemp Hannon, who cosponsored the bill. "Through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination, experts at the top of their field will work towards enhancing research to develop vaccines, create new strategies for prevention and formulate plans of action that prevent the spread of these deadly diseases that threaten the public health."

The legislation was strongly supported by Central New York lawmakers, including Senator David Valesky who cosponsored the measure and Assemblyman William Magnarelli who sponsored the measure in the Assembly.

“Here in Central New York, we’ve seen firsthand the devastating effects diseases like EEE have,” said Assembly sponsor of the bill, Assemblyman William Magnarelli, whose district includes the Syracuse region. “By creating the 21st Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination, medical experts will work to ensure we remain vigilant in the fight against deadly diseases by developing vaccines and safeguards that help to protect people and ultimately save lives.”

Since the death of Oswego County’s 4-year old Maggie Sue Wilcox from the EEE virus in 2011, Senator Ritchie has vowed to help find a vaccine to prevent the disease, and has also taken other steps to protect Central New Yorkers’ health.

Since then, she has secured a total of \$700,000 in state budget funds specifically for EEE education and prevention, and teamed with local health officials, county officials and local school districts to increase awareness.

Today, Maggie Sue’s family is praising the signing of this landmark legislation.

“The loss of our Maggie Sue has been the single most devastating experience our family has endured,” said Donna Wilcox, Maggie Sue’s aunt. “However, out of that loss has come a renewed focus on protecting the public—and teaching them how to protect themselves—from diseases like EEE. Our family cannot thank Senator Ritchie enough for her support of this legislation, which represents a giant leap in the work towards a vaccine that can prevent another future tragedy.”

There have been no other human cases of EEE in Oswego County, though several cases of EEE in horses across the region, including in St. Lawrence County have been noted.

An animal vaccine has existed for years, but no similar treatment is available for humans. All the deaths from EEE have occurred in Oswego and Onondaga Counties in Central New York.