



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

Senate Passes Two Valesky Bills as Part of Sunshine Week

DAVID J. VALESKY March 18, 2010

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SYRACUSE, N.Y.—Government became more transparent and accountable today with passage of a series of bills by the State Senate, two of which are sponsored by Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida). The legislative package coincides with 2010 National Sunshine Week, March 14-20, a national initiative to open a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information.

S. 3195B allows any meeting of a public body to be recorded, broadcast, webcast and photographed. Though proceedings of public bodies have been open to the public since 1977, this bill extends accessibility and transparency by giving citizens the right to record and broadcast those proceedings. “Every citizen has the right to know what happens at public meetings, and today’s technology makes that easier. By passing this legislation, we hope that more people can be informed about the activities of government,” Senator Valesky said.

Another piece of legislation (**S.4284**) ensures that public meetings are held in rooms that sufficiently accommodate the expected audience. The bill encourages public bodies to keep public interest and audience size in mind when scheduling public meetings, to make sure that those who want to attend can reasonably do so.

“When a public body holds a meeting that they know will generate great public interest, it needs to make every effort to guarantee that every citizen who wants to attend and participate can do so,” Senator Valesky said.

Both bills also passed the Assembly this session.

Senator Valesky also led “sunshine” efforts in internal Senate operations. The Senate website now makes available a legislative search engine, committee and chamber votes, chamber transcripts, active lists, and bi-weekly payroll and semi-annual expenditure reports. In addition, all Senate committee meetings and hearings are recorded, many are webcast, and all are archived on the Senate website along with video of chamber proceedings.

“We have made great strides in the Senate in the last two years to draw back the curtain on both Senate and other governmental operations because a transparent and accountable government is a responsive and responsible government,” Senator Valesky said.

Other “sunshine” legislation passed today includes:

S.7054, which amends the Open Meetings Law to allow the court’s authority to invalidate action taken behind closed doors for the purpose of discussion only. This law requires members of the public body to attend a training session concerning the obligations of the open meetings law. This bill ensures that the government remains open and transparent to the public.

S.7109, which requires each agency and house of the legislature to publish records proactively on its internet website that are, or are likely to be, the subject of frequent requests from the same records

available under the freedom of information law.

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