



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

## **State Senators Lee Zeldin, Roy McDonald, and Ken LaValle Host Autism Forum on Long Island**

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Central Islip, N.Y. – State Senator Lee M. Zeldin (R, C, I- Shirley), State Senator Roy J. McDonald (R- Saratoga), Chairman of the State Senate Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee, and State Senator Kenneth P. LaValle (R, C, I- Port Jefferson) hosted an Autism and similar type developmental disabilities forum this past Tuesday, September 13, 2011, at the Touro Law Center in Central Islip. Senator Zeldin, and his colleagues Senator McDonald and Senator LaValle, talked with and listened to experts, educators, service providers, individuals and their families on issues relating to autism and developmental disabilities.

“I was very pleased when Senator McDonald offered to co-host this important forum on Autism with myself and Senator LaValle,” said Senator Zeldin.

“This is something that affects countless families here on Long Island and forums such as these provide us in the State Legislature with the necessary information to craft effective legislation to help in this cause.

Senator McDonald has been a leading advocate for the Autism Community in the Senate and with his leadership and unique expertise we can make real progress.”

“Long Island has seen some of the highest prevalence rates for Autism not only in New York State but across the country, it’s important that we provide opportunities such as this forum to families who have a loved one that has been diagnosed to get information and tell their stories,” said Senator McDonald. “I know firsthand the

struggle that families go through with autism and disabilities, working together we can make things better for these people and that's our job as elected officials."

In June, the State Senate unanimously passed landmark autism insurance reform legislation (S.4005A), sponsored by Senator Charles Fuschillo (R- Merrick), that would enable individuals with autism spectrum disorders to receive insurance coverage for screening, diagnosis and treatment.

"Raising a child with autism places a tremendous amount of stress on families," said Senator LaValle. "When Governor Cuomo signs into law the legislation we passed this past session, New York will join 25 other states that require insurance companies to provide coverage for the screening, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, including behavioral health treatments, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy."

Senator Zeldin has worked with Senator McDonald and Senator Lavalle this year to create a forum for Long Island residents. The experts and service providers at today's event included; Diane Cahill, the NYS Advocacy Chair for Autism Speaks and President of the Autism Coalition of Long Island, GinaMarie Dowling, a Regional Coordinator for Parent to Parent of NYS, Bea Petersen, of the EJ Autism Foundation, Mindy Cassano, of Helping Hands Children Services, Anita Dowd- Neufield, of Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (F.R.E.E.), Dan Rowland, of the Developmental Disabilities Institute (D.D.I), Lorraine Deller, of the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, and Robert Becker, Director of Special Education for Eastern Suffolk BOCES.

During the last hour of the event, attendees were given the opportunity to share their comments, personal stories and direct questions with the Senators.

"Being able to hear the first hand accounts of individuals and families directly affected by Autism was an eye-opening experience. Hearing these stories is the first step towards real solutions to real problems affecting the Autism Community," said Senator Zeldin.