



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## State Will Look to Step Up Eee Efforts

PATTY RITCHIE October 13, 2011

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### **At Ag/Health Roundtable, Officials Pledge to Develop Comprehensive Plan to Protect New Yorkers**

State officials today pledged to step up their efforts to combat Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), committing to a bolder, more “comprehensive” approach to prevent, detect and respond to outbreaks of the deadly virus beginning next summer.

At a roundtable sponsored by Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Patty Ritchie and Health Committee Chair Kemp Hannon, state health, agriculture and environmental officials said they are working on new ways to fight EEE, a mosquito-borne illness that caused the deaths of five Central New York residents, including three in the past three years alone.

“State Health and other officials have pledged to expand their mosquito disease response and control plan for next year with more emphasis on finding and controlling outbreaks of the disease and the mosquitoes

that carry it,” Senator Ritchie said. “That’s good news for Central New York, which has been ‘ground zero’ for this disease for the past 40 years, and other counties in the state that have seen recent outbreaks, including St. Lawrence County.”

Officials said they are modeling their efforts, which will include better coordination with all the affected counties, on expanded state programs to control other diseases carried by insects, including West Nile Virus.

Senator Ritchie’s Roundtable forum brought together top state and local health experts, environmental experts, and animal health and agriculture experts to discuss how to better control the virus and protect human and animal health. The wide-ranging discussion spanned nearly two hours, and covered topics ranging from mosquito habitats, methods of personal protection, and government response. The Senators were told that the disease struck with a particular vengeance this year, showing up earlier and more widely in pools of standing waters that are routinely tested.

Senator Ritchie urged officials to do more to improve communication with the public, including farmers, whose horses and other livestock are at particular risk from EEE. Officials said they would review Senator Ritchie’s suggestion to use the state’s early warning, NY-ALERT system to issue advisories and health warnings.

After the death of four-year-old Maggie Wilcox of Oswego County, Senator Ritchie wrote to the commissioners of Health, Environmental Conservation, and Agriculture and Markets to ask for a list of detailed steps that the agencies were taking or planning to take to counter the spread of EEE to animals and humans.

Senators Ritchie, Hannon and David Valesky met with the Wilcox family prior to the roundtable forum, which was held at the Oswego City School District headquarters in Oswego.

Among steps that state officials expect to take to control the virus and better protect public and animal health:

- placing more emphasis on control and prevention as well as public education on prevention;
- developing an enhanced testing and surveillance program;
- developing risk communication and prevention programs using both personal protective measures and environmental controls.

Cornell University’s Outreach Veterinarian, Dr. Belinda Thompson, said the problem may be even more widespread than it appears because most animals infected and killed by EEE are never tested specifically for the disease. But she also pointed out that while the disease may be infecting other animal species, it can only be spread through the bite of certain species of mosquitoes.

Members of the public will be able to view the complete Roundtable, beginning Friday, at [www.ritchie.nysenate.gov](http://www.ritchie.nysenate.gov).