



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

A Minute to Save a Life

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

As a mother and a grandmother, I know there's nothing better than a newborn baby. I also know that along with the excitement, comes the feeling of wanting to make sure your little one is as healthy as he or she can be.

Last month, a new law I supported went into effect that will help to save more newborn lives by requiring birthing facilities such as general hospitals and clinics to check newborns for congenital heart defects through pulse oximetry screening.

This new law, which ensures all newborns receive this life-saving test is now in place thanks in part to the advocacy of parents across the state, including Kelsey Thomas of Central New York. After giving birth, Thomas brought home what she thought was a healthy baby boy, until just two days after being born, he turned blue. At just eight days old the newborn underwent open-heart surgery to repair a rare congenital heart defect. Today, her son Jacob is a happy, healthy two-year old.

Thanks to this new legislation, before leaving for home for the first time, newborns will receive a pulse oximetry test, also known as "pulse ox." The painless pulse ox screening measures the oxygen in a baby's blood by taping a small sensor to the foot of the newborn, which beams a light through the foot to measure the amount of oxygen in the blood. If oxygen levels are too low, additional tests are then conducted to detect any potential heart defects that may be present in the newborn.

Pulse ox screenings take a mere minute and are effective at detecting critical congenital birth defects that may go undetected by other screening methods. Also known as CHDs, congenital heart defects affect the structure and function of a newborn's heart. They are present in nearly one percent of live births each year and are the leading cause of infant death due to birth defects according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

From the nursery to new toys, with newborns there's so much to be excited about. Now, with this new measure, New York joins nearly half of the states in the United States in requiring this screening, giving parents one less worry and providing little ones with a healthier start to their lives.

