



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara will serve as a member on Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases as regional fears continue to rise

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COMBATting LYME DISEASE

Elmira, N.Y., February 18—As regional concerns about Lyme and other tick-borne diseases have dramatically increased over the past few years, State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats) said today that he will continue to serve as a member of the State Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases.

"It's a debilitating disease that's a major concern for everyone who enjoys the outdoors. It's a serious public health threat that continues to demand our attention, and action," said O'Mara. "We're hopeful that we can encourage and implement state- and federal-level action plans and a comprehensive response. Those who suffer from Lyme disease can endure years of frustration seeking effective diagnosis and treatment. We want to raise awareness and enhance prevention and treatment strategies."

The 17-member task force released a report last year proposing a comprehensive set of legislative recommendations to enhance research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment for these harmful illnesses – including one key initiative unanimously approved by both houses of the Legislature in the closing days of last year's legislative session and subsequently signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo. The new law (S.7854, Chapter 532 of the Laws of 2015) will help people who may benefit from innovative and effective alternative medical treatment. It prevents the state from charging medical professionals with misconduct when the sole issue is providing or recommending treatment for Lyme and other illnesses that is not universally accepted by the medical community.

Another task force recommendation included the creation of a learning collaborative to bring together counties in the state that have already been heavily impacted by the Lyme epidemic with counties that are just beginning to experience outbreaks. The report also recommended convening a statewide conference to bring together state health officials and the research community, including Cornell University, which has now been scheduled for March 24-25, 2015 in Albany. The Senate secured more than \$500,000 in the current state budget for the state's disease elimination and reduction efforts.

The Senate created its task force in October 2013. This year it's being chaired by newly elected Senator Sue Serino of the Hudson Valley, a region where the problem has been particularly acute for years. O'Mara said that the task force intends to keep working to enact additional legislative recommendations to enhance the detection, prevention and treatment of tick-borne illnesses in New York.

Approximately 300,000 Americans are diagnosed with Lyme disease annually, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 450 new cases of Lyme disease were reported in New York State alone last year. That number is expected to continue rising as disease-laden ticks spread to more and more regions of the state, including the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes.

The Senate's full report is available [HERE](#).