



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Lyme disease awareness legislation co-sponsored by O'Mara signed into law ~ O'Mara continues to serve on Senate task force

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 27, 2016

| ISSUE: **LYME DISEASE**

| COMMITTEE: **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**

COMBATTING LYME DISEASE



**Senate Task Force
on Lyme & Tick-Borne Diseases**

Albany, N.Y., July 27—Two pieces of legislation co-sponsored by State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) to bolster the state's efforts to raise public awareness on the prevention of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases have been signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

O'Mara, who serves as a member of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, said the legislation is being approved as regional concerns about Lyme and other tick-borne

diseases have dramatically increased over the past few years.

“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,” said O’Mara, chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee. “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.”

The following measures have been signed into law by the governor:

> Senate Bill Number **5803 (Chapter 167 of the Laws of 2016)** requires the state Department of Health (DOH) to design, develop and disseminate an aggressive, comprehensive and statewide public awareness, education and prevention campaign to reduce the public’s exposure to Lyme and other tick-borne infectious diseases – recognizing the effectiveness and importance of early education and prevention in preventing the spread of these diseases; and

> Senate Bill Number **5804 (Chapter 109 of the Laws of 2016)** complements the statewide DOH awareness campaign by requiring the development of age-appropriate instructional materials and tools that will be made available to schools and libraries to help reach school-age children with the awareness and prevention message. Supporters of the legislation cite an increasing demand from school and libraries for instructional materials geared towards children.

The Senate created its 17-member task force in October 2013. It’s chaired by 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.