



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara sponsoring Lyme disease awareness forum in Big Flats on Thursday, October 6th ~ O'Mara serves on Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases (UPDATED)

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 5, 2016

| ISSUE: **LYME AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES**



"Those who suffer from Lyme disease can endure years of frustration seeking effective diagnosis and treatment. Our ongoing priorities include improving diagnosis and treatment, as well as to raise awareness and enhance prevention strategies. Consequently, thank you to Arnot Health Graduate Medical Education and A Hope 4 Lyme, Inc. for your continued -- and critical -- efforts, initiative, and response. Through events and forums like the 3rd Annual 'Nuts & Bolts of Lyme Disease & Current Updates for Medical Professionals,' we remain hopeful that we will develop, encourage, and implement state- and federal-level action plans and a comprehensive response.

These are debilitating diseases, a major concern for everyone who enjoys the outdoors, and a serious public health threat that continues to demand our attention and action. We are grateful for your commitment.”

Big Flats, N.Y., October 3—State Senator Tom O’Mara, a member of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, will sponsor a “Public Awareness Forum on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases” on Thursday, October 6, 2016 in Big Flats.

The public forum will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Big Flats Community Center (476 Maple Street). O’Mara will be joined by area Assemblymen Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), and Tim Kolpien, Chief of Staff to Rep. Tom Reed (R-Corning). O’Mara has invited a panel of regional public health professionals, educators and researchers to lead the discussion on raising awareness, and ongoing prevention efforts and strategies. The panel will include representatives from the Chemung County Health Department, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University.

“Those who suffer from Lyme disease can endure years of frustration seeking effective diagnosis and treatment. One of the task force’s priorities is to raise awareness and enhance prevention strategies. That’s the overriding purpose of this forum,” said O’Mara, who also serves as Chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee. “Through the task force, we’re hopeful that we can continue to develop, encourage and implement state- and federal-level action plans and a comprehensive response. These are debilitating diseases, a major concern for everyone who enjoys the outdoors and a serious public health threat that continues to demand our attention and action.”

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 works to develop and enact legislative recommendations to enhance the detection, prevention and treatment of tick-borne illnesses

in New York. The task force's initial report, based upon statistics from the state Department of Health (DOH), identified Chemung, Schuylers and other regional counties as having experienced dramatic increases in cases of Lyme disease. Panelists scheduled to participate are:

- > Matt Frye, PhD, NYSIPM Program, Cornell University;
- > Rebecca Becraft, RN, Chemung County Health Department;
- > Jennifer H. Trimber, Environmental Coordinator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chemung County;
- > Brett Chedzoy, Senior Resource Educator (Agriculture-Forestry Specialist), Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuylers County;
- > Richard Terry (DO, MBA, FACOFP), Designated Institutional Officer, Arnot Health; and
- > Sheryl Harnas, Director of Infection Prevention, Arnot Health

Two pieces of legislation O'Mara co-sponsored in 2016 to bolster the state's efforts to raise public awareness on the prevention of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases were recently signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo. The laws were approved as regional concerns about Lyme and other tick-borne diseases have dramatically increased over the past few years.

The new laws are:

- > Senate Bill Number **5803 (Chapter 167 of the Laws of 2016)** to require 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)** to complement 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.

According to recent reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Lyme is the fastest- growing, vector-borne infectious disease in the United States. Approximately 300,000 Americans are diagnosed with Lyme disease annually, the CDC says. More than 450 new cases of Lyme disease were reported in New York State last year. That's a number that's expected to keep rising as disease-laden ticks continue to spread to more and more regions of the state, including the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes.

Read more from The Leader in Corning, "**Forum highlights complexity of Lyme disease**"