



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senate unanimously approves legislation co-sponsored by O'Mara to strengthen Lyme disease strategies: Senators participate in 'Take a Bite Out of Lyme Disease Challenge'

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 15, 2017

| ISSUE: **LYME DISEASE**



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Albany, N.Y., May 15—The New York State Senate today unanimously approved legislation co-sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), a member of the Senate Task Force on

Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, to strengthen statewide efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat the diseases.

O'Mara has served on the task force since its creation in 2013.

"Lyme is 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 continuing to work to 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 education, as well as enhance prevention and treatment strategies."

The Senate is acting on legislation today to:

> take the first major step towards addressing the lack of insurance coverage available to those diagnosed with Lyme disease. Currently, health insurance companies are not required to cover long-term treatment from chronic Lyme or other related diseases, which is devastating for many New Yorkers. People suffering from chronic Lyme disease can experience extreme fatigue, nausea, depression, joint pain and many other symptoms. The legislation would require the State Health Care Quality and Cost Containment Commission to meet annually and submit a report on the impact of providing insurance coverage for Lyme and Tick-Borne disease (**S.2168**);

> provide homeowners with vital and reliable information on the best way to protect their property from ticks. People should be aware of the EPA's approved pesticides that are recommended for tick prevention and the best methods to use pesticides better to protect both people and pets from exposure to ticks on their property. The legislation would direct the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to develop guidelines for best

practices in treating residential properties to reduce exposure to ticks (**S.2588**);

> help ensure medical professionals are properly trained to treat patients with Lyme or other tick-borne diseases. The legislation would authorize the Department of Health (DOH) to award grants for graduate medical education in Lyme and tick-borne diseases, designate organizations as centers of excellence for Lyme and tick-borne diseases, and designate Lyme and tick-borne-disease resource centers (**S.2621**).

The Senate is also expected to approve a Legislative Resolution (**J1493**) designating May 2017 as Lyme Disease Awareness Month in New York State. The resolution helps focus on this significant and complex disease, provides information on and raises public awareness of its causes, effects and treatments, and underscores important education and research efforts surrounding Lyme and tick-borne diseases.

Last year, O'Mara co-sponsored two new Lyme-related laws proposed by the task force:

> **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. It recognizes 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.

Last October, O'Mara sponsored a "Public Awareness Forum on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases" at the Big Flats Community Center. A panel of regional public health professionals, educators and researchers led a discussion on raising awareness, and ongoing prevention efforts and strategies. The panel included representatives from the Chemung County Health Department, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University.

Senator Sue Serino of the Hudson Valley, a region where the problem has been particularly acute for years, currently chairs it. O'Mara said that the task force intends to continue holding public forums and working on 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.

[In the photo above, Senator O'Mara (second from the right, back row) and Senate colleagues participate in the "Take a Bite Out of Lyme Disease" challenge today at the Capitol. Read more about the challenge at <http://lymediseasechallenge.org/join-lyme-disease-challenge/>]