



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

The Heartbreaking Truth About Lyme Disease

Senator Patty Ritchie

May 9, 2019

ISSUE:

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Lyme Disease Awareness

Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Recently, Robin Phillips, the mother of a high school student in Oswego County called my office, upset with the fact that the new New York State budget eliminated \$1 million in important funding to fight Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. As someone who has fought for years for support that has helped fight Lyme disease and raise awareness, I share her frustration.

At the beginning of this school year, Robin's son, Rob was as healthy as a 17 year-old track athlete could be. He was training and gearing up for his senior season and qualifying for sectionals. However, just a few days into the year, he began to feel tired. Unfortunately, no one knew what was happening to Rob. It was not until a month later, when he experienced Bell's palsy on the right side of his face, did doctors do a test that confirmed Rob had Lyme disease.

No one knows where or when a tick bit Rob. He, nor his family ever saw the insect or the rash it typically leaves behind. Within a matter of days, Robin Phillips' son went from running eight miles a day to being physically unable to get out of bed. Not only is Rob's dream of a sectional championship gone, he is struggling to pass the very classes he had success with all his life.

The month of May is nationally recognized as 'Lyme Disease Awareness Month'. It is when we highlight the critical information people need to know about not only the risk and symptoms of Lyme disease, but also on how to prevent tick bites. In sharing his story, Rob and his mother are hoping they can encourage people to take steps to protect themselves, and their loved ones from ticks.

Since 2015, the State Senate has secured \$2.6 million in the State Budget aimed at providing critically important funding for the research and prevention of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. However, in eliminating the \$1 million in funding this year, New York State has seemingly taken two steps back.

Not only does New York State have the third most confirmed cases of Lyme disease in the country, our region is experiencing an alarming rate of new cases reported each year. We must do more to allow our researchers and our medical professionals to better understand these diseases and their warning signs. That is why just recently, I signed on to a letter with my colleagues, asking the Governor to support efforts to stop the spread of Lyme and tick-borne diseases.