



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Senate Majority Advances Legislation To Improve Workplace COVID-19 Safety Standards & Support Workforce

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority today advanced legislation to stand up for workers in New York State. This package will enact the “NY Hero Act” sponsored by Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris, which requires the creation of health and safety standards for COVID-19 and other airborne infectious diseases in the workplace guaranteeing a greater employee voice in the workplace. This package also includes legislation to encourage employer use of shared work programs to avoid layoffs and legislation to increase the amount of shared work benefits to the maximum allowed by federal law. In addition, these bills will promote career paths into healthcare, permit employee time off for vaccinations to be administered, and grant an enhanced death benefit to families of deceased public employees.

“To address the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, we must protect and support a strong workforce,” **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “Workers across the state have shown incredible selflessness and perseverance throughout the pandemic, and this legislation is a step in recognizing and addressing their sacrifices. I commend my colleagues in the Senate Majority for sponsoring this legislation that will have a positive impact on so many hardworking New Yorkers.”

The legislation passed by the Senate Majority includes:

- **NY Hero Act:** This bill, [S.1034A](#), sponsored by Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris, will implement airborne infectious disease standards requiring employers to implement an infectious disease exposure prevention plan.
- **Shared Work Program Petition:** This bill, [S.17A](#), sponsored by Senator Shelley B. Mayer, will allow employees to petition their employer to apply for the shared work program in order to avoid layoffs or to rehire laid off workers.
- **Vaccination Leave:** This bill, [S.2588A](#), sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes, will grant public and private employees four hours of time off, per dose, to receive the coronavirus vaccine.
- **Healthcare Employment Incentivization:** This bill, [S.3470](#), sponsored by Senator Tim Kennedy will require the New York State Department of Labor and Department of

Health to establish a program to incentivize unemployed individuals to enter short-staffed jobs in healthcare by expediting training and certification.

- **Shared Work Program Benefit Extension:** This bill, [S.4049](#), sponsored by Senator Jessica Ramos to increase the amount of unemployment insurance benefits an employee can claim under the shared work program to limits of the federal maximum.
- **Public Employee Death Benefit:** This bill, [S.4681](#), sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes, will extend previously enacted accidental death benefits to the families of frontline workers who have passed away due to COVID-19.

Bill Sponsor, Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris said, “Too many workers have already sacrificed their health for our community’s benefit. The New York HERO Act will honor their efforts by giving workers the tools to protect themselves while on the job. I appreciate the support for this proposal from my colleagues in both houses and so many organizations throughout New York.”

Bill Sponsor and Chair of Senate Committee on Labor, Senator Jessica Ramos said, “Passing my bill, S.4049, to expand our Shared Work program will allow employers to keep their workforces on the payroll longer while simultaneously allowing their employees to supplement their reduced earnings with unemployment benefits. In order to ensure our workforce can survive and come back post-pandemic, we must continue to find ways to improve our systems to better serve working New Yorkers.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Jim Gaughran said, "Today is a somber occasion -- the one year anniversary of New York's first confirmed COVID-19 case. The package of legislation we are advancing will further support essential workers, assist unemployed New Yorkers, and help the families of frontline workers who passed away due to COVID-19. I will continue to work tirelessly in the Senate to address the health and economic issues raised by the ongoing pandemic."

Bill Sponsor Senator Tim Kennedy said, “It is imperative that we develop plans to retrain and utilize our state’s workforce who have been negatively impacted by business closures caused by COVID-19, and we know our medical field is desperately seeking to build its workforce. Through this bill, we’re requiring the Department of Labor, in consultation with the Department of Health, to establish a program that incentivizes unemployed individuals to enter jobs in healthcare. As New York begins to see a light at the end of the tunnel in the war against COVID-19, we should be ensuring that our most valuable asset, our workforce, plays a major role.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Shelley Mayer said, “The NYSDOL’s Shared Work program offers tremendous benefits for both employees and employers. The Shared Work program helps small businesses weather downturn by reducing payroll expenses, while also supporting workers by avoiding layoffs. When an employer enrolls in the Shared Work program, employees are able to receive partial Unemployment Insurance benefits proportional to the number of reduced work hours. My bill allows employees to petition their employer to enroll in the Shared Work program in an effort to broaden the use of the program and help both workers and small business owners.”

Senator Jamaal Bailey said, “It has been a full year since we had the first case of COVID-19 in New York State. Sadly, this pandemic has affected every New Yorker in some way. Whether via the painful loss of a loved one, loss of employment, or forced to close a business, or a host of other matters, New Yorkers have suffered mightily at the hands of COVID-19. This legislative package is aimed to remedy the unforeseen issues that the pandemic created and continue to work towards ensuring that our state is better prepared in the event of another health emergency. I would like to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues that sponsored legislation for this package. The New York Senate Democrats are committed to ensuring that New York is able to recover swiftly and that our communities are able to build back up and have the necessary tools to be even better than before.”

Senator Alessandra Biaggi said “ "Throughout the pandemic, frontline workers have continued to show up to work each day, despite the risks, to keep our communities running. At the same time, more than a million New Yorkers have lost their jobs or faced reduced hours. These bills will provide critical protection to essential workers and lend a helping hand to New Yorkers who are looking for work or trying to survive working reduced hours. I am proud to join my colleagues in passing this legislation, and want to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for her leadership,"

Senator Samra Brouk said, “Getting New Yorkers safely back to work is one of my top priorities. That’s why I’m cosponsoring the New York Hero Act, which instructs the State to develop clear guidelines for what employers must do moving forward to prevent exposure to airborne infections in the workplace. This package of workplace safety and support legislation passed by the New York State Senate is an important step toward ensuring that New Yorkers who are keeping our state running during this unprecedented pandemic have essential protections in place for themselves and their families.”

Senator Leroy Comrie said, "The Senate Majority remains steadfast in our commitment to improving safety and equity in workplaces throughout the state. I am proud to support each of these bills, and I thank Leader Stewart-Cousins and my conference colleagues for advancing this COVID-19 workplace safety legislative package."

Senator Jeremy Cooney said, “This pandemic has shown that workers in New York are more vulnerable than ever, and they need help. This package of legislation will protect workers by providing additional safety and benefits during this unprecedented crisis. I will continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that workers have the resources they need as we recover from this pandemic.

Senator Andrew Gounardes said, "The sacrifice of public workers has pulled us through this crisis. To properly honor the memories of our fallen heroes, it's crucial that we ensure their family members are cared for and to ensure that those who are still on the front lines of this deadly pandemic have access to the vaccine immediately. It is a matter of public health and simply what is right. With today's legislative package, we honor our public workers and the many sacrifices they have made and protect public health."

Senator Pete Harckham said, "I fully support this package of bills because it is vital that hard-working residents are protected at the workplace to the maximum extent possible during the Covid pandemic."

Senator Michelle Hinchey said, "Workers are the backbone of New York's economy and our state needs to be a partner in protecting their safety and advancing opportunities to get people back on the job. From paid vaccination leave to shared work benefit programs, the legislation we've advanced today makes clear that our state is committed to improving workplace safety and benefits for all who are risking their health and well-being to keep our communities running."

Senator Jackson said, "I have stood up for workers' rights my whole career, so it's pained me to see how workers have suffered because of inadequate protections during this pandemic. Helping employees return to work safely and confidently during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is no easy task. Workers suffer flagrant disregard for health and safety requirements and employers seek new ways to provide service while keeping their workforce and others safe. Today, this legislation package shows our ability to work together as a Senate Majority to up workers' rights through enforceable health and safety standards that will keep our working-class safe on the job address, and we keep all New Yorkers safe."

Senator John Liu said, "Creating a safe environment for workers is a crucial step in New York's economic recovery. Workers should be able to do their jobs without fear of getting infected. In addition, providing employees with time off to get vaccinated will make workplaces safer and will make it easier for more people to get the shot, helping us achieve collective immunity. This package of workplace safety and support bills will have a significant impact on the statewide return to normal."

Senator John Mannion said, "I co-sponsored the NY HERO Act because the pandemic has shown that we must have stronger infectious disease protections for workers. The bill requires the state to develop protocols for employers to combat airborne and other illnesses. Workers must have access to health screenings, face coverings, and PPE. It also holds bad actors accountable and ends confusion for business owners through standardized and uniform guidance."

Senator Rachel May said, "Workers across the state have done heroic work to keep industries moving and people safe in so many ways throughout the pandemic, and it is imperative that we show that we appreciate their work and sacrifice by providing them with the benefits and protections they need and deserve. The legislative package we are passing today will help keep workers safe, allow them to better access unemployment benefits, and retrain for critical jobs, and I am proud to support it."

Senator Zellnor Myrie said, "It is critical that our workplaces are equipped with the proper protocols and resources to create safe working environments while we rebuild our economic infrastructure. The COVID-19 workplace safety legislative package will ensure this is done during the pandemic and beyond. I am grateful to my colleagues in Senate for prioritizing the safety and well-being of working New Yorkers."

Senator Sean Ryan said, “The pandemic has taken a significant toll on our workforce here in New York and around the nation. This legislative package will protect our frontline workers and help to ensure all New Yorkers have access to essential workplace protections. The actions we are taking today will support our small businesses, protect workers on the job, improve our vaccination program, and provide new opportunities for success for the people of our great state.”

Senator Julia Salazar said, “COVID-19 has taken a tremendous toll on our communities, and has highlighted the importance of workplace safety. This legislative package ensures that workers rights are protected and expanded amid the ongoing pandemic. Working class New Yorkers are the backbone of our economy, and have continued to bear the burden of our state’s needs throughout this crisis. I fully support this legislative package, and I thank my colleagues in the Senate for their commitment to codifying worker protections and creating safer work environments in New York.”

Senator James Sanders Jr. said: “The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly all aspects of life. In order to return to some semblance of normalcy, we need to provide New Yorkers with as much assistance as possible especially when it comes to healthcare, being vaccinated, and maintaining a safe workplace environment. This package of bills will collectively address many issues caused by the coronavirus and I stand with my colleagues as we work to make these bills become law.”

Senator Toby Ann Stavisky said, “The COVID-19 Workforce Protections Legislative Package helps the families of frontline workers who tragically succumbed to the virus, assists those still struggling to find work because of the virus, and helps New Yorkers receive a vaccination as we fight this pandemic. I thank my colleagues in the Senate Majority for passing this legislation to aid our struggling communities.”

Mario Cilento, president of the New York State AFL-CIO said, "We thank Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, the Senate Democratic Majority, and the numerous sponsors of this package of bills including Senators Gianaris, Ramos, Gounardes, and Mayer. This package provides a comprehensive approach to address the needs of workers in our fight against this pandemic both in terms of exposure prevention and the economic fallout. The centerpiece of this package, the NY HERO Act, establishes safety standards related to workplace protocols for the current crisis as well as for future communicable disease events. The package also ensures workers will get paid time off to be vaccinated helping to bring us closer to beating this disease; it puts in place improvements to our unemployment system for those who lost their jobs; and it extends death benefits for public sector workers who lost their lives during the pandemic."

New York State United Teachers President Andy Pallotta said, “Whether they work in our schools, colleges or hospitals, our members have shown perseverance and resilience as they’ve continued to deliver for the New Yorkers they serve. This legislative package shows lawmakers have their backs and the backs of workers across the state. We thank the Senate for passing these critical bills and will continue working with them to ensure the needs of our labor force are met throughout this pandemic.”

Gary LaBarbera, President, New York State Building & Construction Trades Council said, “The Building Trades are proud to support legislation which strengthens labor protections for workers across the State. We believe all construction workers, regardless of union affiliation, have the right to appropriate job security, worksite safety and fundamental justice in performing their duties as essential workers in the New York State economy. We thank Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins for her advocacy and look forward to working with the Senate on many other issues critical to protecting the rights of New York’s construction workers.”

Stuart Appelbaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) said, "As the pandemic has highlighted yet again, workplace safety must be prioritized. We need the enforceable standards at the state level provided in this bill to keep all working New Yorkers safe. No worker should be forced to sacrifice their health and safety in order to earn a living. I want to thank Senator Gianaris for spearheading this critical legislation and the Senate for passing it today, Assembly Member Reyes for being a champion in the Assembly, and all our allies in Albany for putting workers' health and safety first. Now let's get it signed into law."

President Thomas Mungeer of the New York State Troopers PBA said, “The Senate has taken an important step in protecting our first responders who have and continue to maintain the front lines during this horrible pandemic. The survivors of these fallen heroes have suffered enough and this legislation is a small step towards helping these families avoid additional tragedies. We would like to thank these legislators for the expedited passage of S.4681 and urge the Governor to sign this into law as soon as possible.”

Henry Garrido, Executive Director, District Council 37, AFSCME said, “The health and safety of our members is paramount. As they continue to show up every day and perform their essential duties to keep New York City running, it’s critical our legislators do all they can to ensure their safety. These bills should be passed and signed into law immediately.”

Mary E. Sullivan, CSEA President said, “So many CSEA members put their lives on the line by continuing to provide essential services throughout the pandemic. For those who died as a result of their commitment to public service, we owe their families an unpayable debt.” CSEA applauds New York’s elected officials for recognizing the sacrifices of these brave workers by extending this very important legislation for their survivors.”

Kyle Bragg, President of 32BJ SEIU, said, “An extension on the Shared Work Program is going to help New York recover from the pandemic. When first put into action, it helped tremendously to soften the blow to working people at the front lines of COVID-19, and is one of the most successful programs for essential workers that New York implemented last year. We applaud the New York State Senate for voting to extend this essential program.”

Dennis Trainor, Vice President of CWA D1 said, "Expanding workers' rights and protections is at the center of every labor union's core mission. New York's essential workers have kept this state running while facing the biggest public health threat in generations. It's time for us to step up and provide them the protections they need and deserve. We applaud Leader Stewart-Cousins and the New York State Senate for passing this important package of labor protections that will

ensure that our frontline workers have a voice in the health and safety in their workplaces, that boosts unemployment benefits and provides that workers to stay connected to their employment as our economy rebounds and that families of those we lost to this deadly disease are taken care of."

Wayne Spence, PEF President said, "PEF members and their families are deeply grateful for the passage of this important COVID relief package. Establishing time off for vaccination will speed up the immunization process and help our state get through this crisis sooner. Additionally, the extension of the COVID death benefit shows the Senate's commitment to the families of PEF members who died bravely serving their fellow New Yorkers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Beverley Brakeman, United Auto Workers Region 9A Regional Director said, "We applaud Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Deputy Majority Leader Gianaris for their leadership in advancing the NY Hero Act to the Senate floor for a vote today. The NY Hero Act will ensure every worker benefits from the same health and safety standards so that they can perform their job safely, especially throughout the pandemic. These health and safety standards are also enforceable which was the critical missing piece to making sure that employers are doing what is required of them to protect their workers. We look forward to the bill's passage today, and we urge the Assembly to quickly follow suit."

Jeff Binz, UAW Region 9 Director, said, "Right now, working women and men are putting their lives on the line by going to work while corporations are making billions. The NY Hero Act will serve the health and safety of our working heroes. This pandemic has sickened and killed so many while the passing of this Act will save so many. To create an Act that will enforce minimum standards for workplace safety is just common sense. Regulations including protocols on testing, social distancing, PPE, disinfecting and engineering controls will save lives. Everyone deserves safe working conditions."

Pat Kane, RN, NYSNA Executive Director, said, "This package of bills is a massive step forward for all of New York's healthcare heroes and essential workers who put themselves at risk for our community's benefit. The pandemic has underscored the fact that New York workers are the ones who keep the state moving forward and the proposed bills would dramatically expand protections for nurses, essential workers and their loved ones. From implementing minimum workplace safety standards to prevent COVID-19 spread to extending death benefits for workers who risked their lives and died of COVID-19 and more, New York State Nurses Association applauds the Senate's efforts to bring this legislative package forward and do right by healthcare heroes and their families."

Ryan Law, PBANYS President said, "The Police Benevolent Association of New York State (PBANYS) thanks Senator Gounardes and Assemblyman Fall for their leadership in initiating and leading to passage of the bill granting public employees time off to get vaccinated. It is reassuring to see these two legislators be joined by their colleagues to support public-sector workers. Their leadership demonstrates how important the COVID-19 vaccine is to all New Yorkers Public Health. The PBANYS is grateful for their support."

Michael O'Meara, President of the New York State Association of PBAs, the largest umbrella organization of police organizations in New York, representing more than 45,000 police officers, said, "We thank the sponsor, Senator Andrew Gounardes, and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, wholeheartedly, for advancing these legislative measures regarding the COVID-19 Coronavirus. These bills demonstrate the commitment of the Senate Democratic Conference to the protection of our front-line members, and to that of all public employees who selflessly serve the citizens of this state, against the ravages of this insidious disease."

Helen Schaub, Vice President and Director of Policy and Legislation, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, said, "We commend the New York State Senate Majority for putting forward a legislative package to strengthen the rights of frontline workers as we face the ongoing pandemic. The NY HERO Act will help ensure standards to protect workers from airborne infections in their workplaces and allow them meaningful input into safety plans. Moving quickly to grant workers paid time off to receive COVID-19 vaccinations is the right thing to do, and we are glad the Senate is taking action now."

Teamsters Joint Council 16 President George Miranda, said "Throughout the pandemic, the Teamsters have continued their daily jobs on the frontlines to keep New York State running. The NY Hero Act ensures that New York's essential workers have clear and concise safety measures in place to keep our members and their families safe. We are thankful to Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris and the Majority Conference for hearing our concerns and furthering workforce protections."

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