

# Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



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## **Senator Helming: Senate Passes Bills to Fight Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases**

GENEVA – Senator Pam Helming today announced that the New York State Senate recently passed a package of legislation to strengthen efforts to combat Lyme and tick-borne diseases. During this time of year, ticks are becoming active once again. In particular, Senator Helming – a member of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases – co-sponsored measures that would establish a pilot program for Lyme and tick-borne disease testing in children and establish a standard protocol for diagnosis and treatment.

“Lyme and tick-borne diseases are a growing public health issue. As Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources and member of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, I have worked to highlight the impact that these infectious diseases have on our local communities and families. After hearing directly from patients, advocates, doctors, and scientists, it is clear to me that there are many steps we can take together to develop better measures for the diagnosis and treatment of these illnesses. We must provide the public with the most accurate information. I am hopeful the Governor will join us in furthering our efforts to help our communities and families who are struggling with Lyme and tick-borne diseases,” Senator Helming said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), New York State has the third-highest number of confirmed cases of Lyme disease in the entire country. Since Lyme reporting became available in 1986, there have been over 95,000 cases of Lyme disease in New York State alone. Senator Helming and her Senate colleagues have been actively working to help reverse this trend. During this year’s budget negotiations, the Task Force secured \$1 million – a record level of funding – to support ongoing education and prevention efforts. This package of legislation builds upon the progress already made to address the spread of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases.

Bill S.7169 would establish a pilot program under the direction of the Commissioner of Health for Lyme and tick-borne disease testing in children. Under the program, health care practitioners and providers will submit samples from children who present with clinical diagnoses, such as juvenile arthritis, that have similar symptoms to Lyme and tick-borne diseases. The medical institution or laboratory chosen by the Commissioner for this program would be required to submit a report on health outcomes and develop a graduate medical education curriculum to

teach medical students about these illnesses. While New York has taken important steps in raising public awareness in schools about preventative ways of avoiding tick infections, experts note that the highest rate of infections for Lyme and tick-borne diseases are in young children.

Bill S.6926 would direct the Commissioner of Health to establish a standard protocol for the diagnosis and treatment of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. As part of this protocol, the Commissioner will work with health care providers and experts to develop a standardized notification form of related symptoms, risk factors, diagnosis, and other information relating to Lyme and tick-borne diseases. This form will be distributed by providers to each person under their care being tested for Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. Currently, patients struggle for months or even years to get the proper diagnosis and treatment, seeking care from many different specialists to determine the reason for the symptoms they suffer.

Bill S.7168 would require a coroner, pathologist, medical examiner, or other qualified examiner who discovers Lyme and tick-borne disease infections during an examination of a deceased person to report the case to the Department of Health. Existing statistics on Lyme and tick-borne diseases may not include total deaths because these infections exacerbate pre-existing conditions and may not be listed as the cause of death as a result. However, public health authorities note that these infections pose fatal risks, so it is important to report cases in which Lyme and tick-borne diseases underlie the primary cause of death for appropriate monitoring and accounting.

*Senator Helming represents the 54<sup>th</sup> Senate District, which consists of Seneca and Wayne Counties, parts of Cayuga and Ontario Counties, and the towns of Lansing and Webster. For more information, please visit Senator Helming's [website](#), or follow @SenatorHelming on Facebook or Twitter.*

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