



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

State Senator Liz Krueger Urges Passage of Emergency Contraception Legislation to Prevent Unintended Pregnancies

LIZ KRUEGER April 3, 2006

Albany, NY – State Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) backed an effort last week by Senate Democrats to force a vote on a measure that would have allowed pharmacists and registered nurses to dispense emergency contraception understanding doctors orders. The motion was voted down along party lines. “The simple truth is that there are an estimated 122,000 unintended pregnancies and 82,000 abortions every year in New York State each year that could be prevented by offering timely access to emergency contraception. Think of the emotional trauma that women and families are forced to face because this legislation is being blocked by Senate Republicans,” said Senator Krueger.

Senator Krueger indicated that one of the arguments against passage of this bill was to wait for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve emergency contraception for over the counter use. The FDA’s independent advisory committee voted in 2003 to approve emergency contraception for over the counter use. After years of debate, however, the FDA decided in late 2005 to indefinitely postpone making a decision.

Recognizing the likelihood of delay, Senate Democrats first introduced the Unintended Pregnancy Prevention Act in 2002 and fought for its passage. Year after year, Senate Republicans blocked the bill, but surprised many analysts and advocates last year by finally allowing the bill to come to a vote. Emergency contraception legislation passed both houses, only to be vetoed by the Governor. None of the Republican Senators who voted for the bill last year supported the motion to bring it to a vote today.

"Between politically motivated inaction by the FDA and partisan politics, the reproductive rights of women have been slowly eroding," stated Senator Krueger. "New York was once a trailblazer on reproductive rights, having passed legislation to decriminalize abortion prior to the Roe v. Wade decision. The Senate Republicans showed their true colors last displaying their devotion to the agenda of the radical right-wing by refusing to support the motion. Unfortunately, Senate Republicans have once again placed politics before the needs of the people of New York."

The Senate Democrats proposal would allow nurses and pharmacists to dispense emergency contraception through non-patient specific orders, authorized by a physician, nurse practitioner or nurse midwife. Women would be given written instructions on using the pills correctly and the importance of receiving follow-up care. The bill further requires that emergency contraception only be dispensed to female patients and only for a single course of treatment, which directly addresses concerns raised in the Governor's veto message last year.

According to Senator Krueger, emergency contraception has been proven to be highly effective in preventing pregnancy if taken within 72 hours. The bill bypasses the difficulty of getting an appointment and obtaining the necessary prescription, factors that may cause some women to miss the window of opportunity.

“The argument that a woman has ample time to see a doctor and get a prescription is simply not true. This bill expedites the process and allows women the opportunity to obtain the medication in a timely manner and prevent an unwanted pregnancy,” said Senator Krueger.

A study of emergency contraception in California and Washington State found that 50 percent of the women who obtained the pills without a prescription did so on the weekend or evening. By making emergency contraception available at pharmacies and from nurses without a patient-specific prescription, an estimated 82,000 abortions and almost 40,000 unintended pregnancies could be prevented annually in New York State.

If this legislation were to become law, New York State would join a number of states, including New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Washington State, Alaska, Hawaii, New Mexico and California, that allow pharmacists to dispense emergency contraception understanding doctors orders.

The State Assembly passed its version of the Unintended Pregnancy Prevention Act earlier this year, as they have done for several years now.

