



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Governor Signs Oppenheimer Legislation Protecting Summer Day Campers

SUZI OPPENHEIMER October 1, 2009

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Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) is pleased to announce that her bill, S.4944-A, protecting the health and safety of thousands of campers throughout the state, was signed into law on September 16, 2009.

The new law will permit local health departments, such as the Westchester County Department of Health, to inspect many more day camps than was previously possible. Prior law required the inspection of only those camps that conducted more than half of their activities outdoors. Day camp programs have become more varied, however, with hundreds of new camps, including circus camps and many sports camps, centered primarily indoors. Closing this potentially dangerous gap in state regulation, the new law amends the definition of summer day camps to include any camp engaging in “nonpassive recreational activities with significant risk of injury.”

“Campers throughout the state should be protected from unsafe conditions, whether they attend camps that are primarily indoors or out,” said Senator Oppenheimer. “I am pleased that the Governor has recognized the need to extend the same health and safety standards to all day camps.”

The legislation was strongly supported by the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO), the Camp Directors Association and the Westchester Department of Health. A 2003 survey by NYSACHO found that, of the 30 counties reporting, more than 38,000 children attended 136 camps that were exempt from health and safety regulation because more than 50 percent of their activities were conducted indoors. The legislation also increases the camp permit fee, from \$100 to \$200, to help defray the costs of the inspection and permitting process.

In Westchester County, the local Department of Health inspects more than 260 camps each summer. These inspections cover everything from staff training and certifications to health and fire safety, as well as camp waterfront activities. The new law, which takes effect on April 1, 2011, gives the County the authority to inspect more than two dozen camps that had been exempt under prior law.

"This new law should give parents some peace of mind because all camps in Westchester will be subjected to thorough inspections by our health department," said Westchester County Executive Andy Spano. "We are very pleased the Governor and the Legislature recognized the importance of updating the existing law to reflect the diversity of camp programs that exist for children today, both indoors and out. And we are very grateful to our sponsoring legislators, Amy Paulin and Suzi Oppenheimer, who pushed long and hard for this bill right until the end."

"When children go off to camp each morning, parents assume their children are in good hands and that minimum standards of health and safety have been set by the state, and met by the camp," said Assemblywoman Paulin. "But under the old law, this was not the case."

"I am pleased to have worked with Assemblywoman Paulin on this important legislation," concluded Senator Oppenheimer. "Day camps should be fun, enjoyable – and above all safe -- places for our children to spend their summer days."