



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Serrano Supports Introduction of Sweeping Rules Reform

JOSÉ M. SERRANO January 18, 2011

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(ALBANY, NY)- Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx) and his Senate colleagues today called on every member of the New York State Senate to join them in passing a rules reform resolution, sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan), which aims to create more accountability and equality within the New York State Senate, and to protect the reforms passed by the Legislature in 2009.

“I’m extremely proud of the reforms we were able to get passed while in the Majority. We

took steps within the Democratic Conference to make the Senate more accountable by giving all members an opportunity to have their voices heard,” said Serrano. “We must continue to work in a bipartisan fashion to implement reforms that will equally benefit all New Yorkers. The reforms presented today will among other things, help create a more robust committee process and establish equal staff allocations for all Senators- providing each District with the resources they deserve.”

Serrano, an advocate for transparency in Albany, who served on the Temporary Senate Committee on Rules and Administration Reform and Co-Chaired the Advisory Board on the Broadcast of Government Proceedings, took the opportunity to stress the importance of an open and equitable Legislative body.

“Last year I introduced legislation that deals with one of the biggest bones of contention each budget season- the allocation of member item funds,” said the Senator. “I was able to get 17 of my colleagues - from both sides of the aisle- to join me as co-sponsors.”

The Serrano bill (S1681/855), carried in the Assembly by Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, empowers state agencies to oversee the spending of the allocated funds, and requires them to publicly report on the usage of distributed member items. The legislation also requires that any groups wishing to receive member items be pre-certified by the Attorney General.

Like the resolution introduced by Senator Krueger, the legislation states that all members of both the Senate and Assembly must receive equal shares of the member items allocated to each house. Currently, discretionary funds are disproportionately distributed, with the majority party receiving a significantly larger portion of funds.

“Until the system becomes more equitable and transparent, certain districts and

organizations will continue to benefit at the expense of others," said Serrano, who announced last year, while in the Majority, that he would not be accepting member items until the process is equitable among all legislators.

Serrano also expressed his hope that the Republican Majority will move forward with establishing a New York State Legislative channel. "On the Advisory Board on the Broadcast of Government Proceedings, I worked alongside my Co-Chair, Assembly Minority Leader, Ron Canestrari, to establish a bi-partisan board. By lifting the curtain, not just on Senate session, but on other important parts of the lawmaking process, we are providing programming that enables the public to become engaged in the workings of their government and to take informed positions on the issues that matter to them."

"The 22-point plan presented today is a fantastic step toward a more open and inclusive legislative process," he continued. "It is my hope that we can all work together to pass these reforms, which will greatly benefit the people of New York."

The resolution includes reforms that would improve the committee process by reducing the number of committees from 32 to 23 and the maximum number of committees per Senator from 7 to 5. If the resolution is passed, committee members will also have to be present at committee meetings to cast votes.

"Having served as Chair of the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, I worked to create a more robust committee process," said the Senator. "One of the biggest challenges I faced was attendance. This was not the fault of the members, who simply had too many obligations. By consolidating the number of committees, members will have the time to attend more meetings, which will lead to more productive discussions on the issues."

Also on the 22-point plan is the establishment of equal staff allocations for all Senators, with supplements for Chairs and Ranking Members. “When the Democratic Conference implemented rules changes in 2009, we gave Minority members a bigger staff allocation than we had ever seen while in the Minority. We also provided funds so that the Ranking Member of a committee could hire a staff person. Allowing the Ranking Member to be more engaged will create a more fair and inclusive committee process.”

Serrano continued, “It is important to note that most states provide equal allocations for all Senators, regardless of their party affiliation. New York must live up to its reputation as a trailblazing state, rather than continue to engage in archaic, unfair and ineffective practices when it comes to rules and administration.”

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