



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Roy J. McDonald

## McDonald Hosts Long Island Autism Forum

ROY J. MCDONALD September 14, 2011

| ISSUE: **MENTAL HEALTH, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

| COMMITTEE: **MENTAL HEALTH**

**Central Islip – September 13, 2011** - Senator Roy McDonald (R-Saratoga), Chairman of the New York State Senate’s Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee, held an Autism and similar type developmental disabilities forum on Tuesday, September 13 in Central Islip. McDonald and his colleagues Senator Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) and Senator Ken LaValle (R-Port Jefferson) talked with and listened to experts, educators, service providers, individuals and their families on issues relating to autism and developmental disabilities.

“Long Island has seen some of the highest prevalence rates for Autism not only in New York State but across the country, it’s important that we provide opportunities such as this forum to families who have a loved one that has been diagnosed to get information and tell their stories,” said McDonald. “I know firsthand the struggle that families go through with autism and disabilities, working together we can make things better for these people and that’s our job as elected officials”

McDonald has held numerous forums across New York during his time in the Assembly and Senate, where he’s Chaired Special Task Forces on Autism and Developmental Disabilities. He’s used the information gained at these events to create legislation, now as the Chairman of the Senate’s Mental Health Committee he’s working diligently to continue getting information and pass positive legislative items.

McDonald has worked with Zeldin and Lavallo since this year’s legislative session to create a forum for Long Island residents. The experts and service providers at today’s event included; Diane Cahill the Chair of Autism Speaks, Gina Marie Dowling a Regional Coordinator for

Parent to Parent of NYS, Bea Petersen of EJ Autism Foundation and Mindy Cassano of Helping Hands Children Services.

During the last hour of the event, attendees are given the opportunity to share their comments, personal stories and direct questions to the Senators or panel. Some of the best ideas come out of this portion of the forum.

“Hearing the specific situations individuals and their families deal with everyday will many times begin the process of solving real problems. It could be something a simple individual problem or a big picture issue but hearing their stories is the first step toward helping them out,” said McDonald.

###