



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Eee: Ritchie Report Includes Recommendations for Battling Deadly Virus

PATTY RITCHIE February 21, 2012

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### **Seeks Solutions to Prevent New Outbreak of Virus in Oswego Count**

State Senator Patty Ritchie today released a 93-page report on last summer's EEE outbreak that took the life of a 4-year-old Oswego County girl, the third fatality in three years caused by the mosquito borne virus.

The report, including 13 specific recommendations to improve the state and local response to the virus, is the result of last Fall's Roundtable sponsored by the Senate Committees on Agriculture, chaired by Senator Ritchie, and Health, chaired by Senator Kemp Hannon.

"The death of Maggie Sue Wilcox last summer focused the public's attention on the problem of EEE which, while not unique to Central New York, appears to have hit this region especially hard and with tragic consequences," Senator Ritchie said. "In response, my Roundtable brought together the experts and officials charged with protecting human, as well as animal life, to try to find ways to prevent additional

loss of life.”

“It’s already produced positive results, by gaining a commitment from the state and county to more aggressively attack the problem, improve communication and cooperation to reduce the risk and save lives. The recommendations in this report build on that commitment in the hope that we can prevent another tragedy,” Senator Ritchie said.

During the Senate Roundtable, state and county officials pledged to step up their response to EEE this year, and announced plans to improve coordination among all the counties in the Central New York region that have experienced outbreaks.

Senators Ritchie and Hannon hailed that announcement, and also made other specific recommendations, including:

- **Human vaccine**—The Senators urged the state Health Department to coordinate with 19 other states impacted by EEE to make development of a human vaccine a priority. While an effective animal vaccine already exists, participants in the Roundtable were concerned that little progress has been made to develop a version for humans;
- **Horse vaccine and registry**—The Senators recommend the creation of a voluntary registry of horse owners to allow better communication from state and health officials in cases of outbreaks. The Senators recommended an incentive of reduced cost vaccines to encourage horse owners to enroll;
- **Improve detection**—Officials were urged to step up their efforts toward early detection of the virus, and seek to utilize methods that are employed by other states, if they are found to be practical and effective;
- **Update the state “Action Plan”**—The Senators called on the state Health Department to update its mosquito disease control plans, which haven’t been modified in more than a decade, to include EEE and other growing threats;
- **State costs**—The Senators are urging the state to pick up a larger share of the costs of aerial spraying and other controls on state-owned lands. A significant portion of Oswego County’s spray zone—and much of the mosquito breeding areas—comprises state land, but county taxpayers still pay half the cost for treatment and testing.
- **Improve communication**—In addition to encouraging state and county officials to improve their coordination efforts, Senator Ritchie encouraged Oswego County to utilize the state’s automated NY-Alert system to provide email, text and telephone advisories to residents of infected areas, and enhance communication with farmers and others during periods of high risk;
- **Larvicides for homeowners**—To recruit area residents in prevention efforts, the Senators proposed a pilot program to provide free larvicides to homeowners that could be used to treat standing water to prevent mosquito breeding, like a program in use in Saratoga County;

- **Issues involving aerial spraying**—State officials are urged to investigate if steps are needed to ensure the continued availability of the sole privately owned aerial spray company that services the area. Loss of that service could cripple prevention and treatment efforts for EEE and others throughout the state.

Senator Ritchie said that she was reviewing possible legislation to implement some of the recommendations.

The complete report is available below, and by calling Senator Ritchie's office at 342-2057.