



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Dean G. Skelos

Senate Passes Legislation to Require Inmates to Make Medical Copayments

DEAN G. SKELOS May 14, 2012

The New York State Senate today passed a bill ([S.476](#)), sponsored by Senator Michael Nozzolio (R-C, Fayette), that would protect the taxpayers of New York State by requiring state and county correctional facility inmates to make copayments for health care visits the same policy that is in place in the federal prison system and two-thirds of the states.

“Hardworking taxpayers are being forced every day to change or even drop their health care coverage because of rising premiums, unbearable co-pays and outrageous state taxes on healthcare benefits. Meanwhile, those convicted of violent crimes, murder, rape, robbery and drug offenses enjoy unlimited access to free health care at taxpayer expense,” said Senator Nozzolio, Chairman of the Senate Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee.

New York taxpayers spend over \$121 million per year to provide top-of-the-line health care to prisoners, amounting to about \$2,000 per inmate. This legislation requires prisoners to pay \$7 per visit as a co-payment for medical treatment. No inmate would be denied medical treatment for an inability to pay, but it would reduce the excessive and non-emergency health care visits currently taking place in our prisons and save millions of taxpayer dollars each year.

Senator Nozzolio pointed out that the health care benefits provided to the state’s inmates are often expensive and medically unnecessary. Often, inmates will schedule medical appointments when nothing is wrong simply as a way of passing their time behind bars, because it’s free.

In 2000, the federal government successfully adopted and implemented a copayment system for federal prisoners, saving the Department of Justice millions of dollars every year. More than 2/3 of states have already enacted copayments for inmate medical services, including California, Arizona, Pennsylvania and Nevada. In states that have instituted a copay program, the abuse in the number of sick call visits by inmates was reduced by as much as

76 percent, also saving these states millions of taxpayer dollars.

“New York should join the federal government and many other states and require inmates to pay their fair share for health care services,” Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos said. “This legislation would provide a significant measure of relief for taxpayers.”

“Recently, we have heard shocking reports that New York State taxpayers are paying for expensive hormone treatments for inmates at Auburn Correctional Facility who are preparing to undergo gender modification,” continued Senator Nozzolio. “Instances like this only continue to illustrate the critical need for this legislation. The time is long overdue for the State Assembly to act and join my Senate colleagues and I in adopting this measure so that we can see it enacted into law.”

The bill was sent to the Assembly.