



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Ritchie Bill Boosts Effort to Find Vaccine for Eee

PATTY RITCHIE June 21, 2012

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### **Directs State Health Leaders to Target “21<sup>st</sup> Century” Challenges**

The State Senate voted today to approve major legislation sponsored by Senator Patty Ritchie to marshal financial resources and target state efforts to search for a vaccine to prevent EEE and other vexing diseases, and help protect the lives of New Yorkers.

Senator Ritchie’s bill, S.7778, creates a “21<sup>st</sup> Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination and Reduction” within the Department of Health, comprising top experts in diseases, infection and public health, and charged with finding ways to push for the development of effective vaccines against EEE, Lyme disease, tuberculosis and HIV.

The measure sprang from the EEE Roundtable Senator Ritchie and Senate Health Committee Chair Kemp Hannon hosted in Oswego last October, with state and local health, agriculture and elected leaders in order to find ways to step up efforts against EEE. The bill is cosponsored by Senator Hannon, as well as Central New York Senator David J. Valesky.

“Vaccines are modern medicine's most successful and efficient public health tools for preventing disease and death, but for some of the most serious and deadly diseases, including EEE, there is currently no human vaccine,” Senator Ritchie said.

“I can't legislate a vaccine for EEE, but I can help focus the attention of the scientists, the experts and the public on the problem, and direct our efforts toward finding a solution that will save lives.”

EEE is a disease spread by mosquitoes that primarily infects horses, but is also responsible for five human deaths in Central New York in the past 30 years, including last summer's death of 4-year-old Maggie Sue Wilcox of New Haven, Oswego County.

Since that time, Senator Ritchie has been leading the fight to stop EEE, including securing additional state budget funding for mosquito control; and encouraging better coordination among counties, state and regional agencies.

The bill:

- Directs the Department of Health to report on the availability of both human and animal vaccines for EEE and other diseases;
- Directs the department to coordinate efforts among its several bureaus to study international research and development for vaccines;
- Requires that officials consult with national disease experts to coordinate efforts at finding effective vaccines;
- Directs the department to identify funding sources, including existing health care block grants as well as private and corporate funds, for additional research and development of an EEE vaccine.

Senator Ritchie said that pressing for a human vaccine is the “third leg” in her efforts to combat EEE, which have also included forging closer cooperation between state and the region's local governments, and providing additional state funding for the local fight for EEE prevention.

Recent developments in the fight include:

- ü Approval by the State Comptroller, Attorney General and Department of Agriculture and Markets for a new program to provide private landowners in EEE-impacted counties with larvicides to help prevent the spread of EEE-infected mosquitoes;
- ü Creation of a state-funded vaccination program for horses in counties of Central New York and St. Lawrence County, which have experienced horse deaths last year;
- ü Passage by both the Senate and Assembly of legislation that was needed to increase reimbursement to impacted counties for aerial spraying to control EEE-carrying mosquitoes.

The bill was sent to the Assembly.