



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Scaling Back Obesity: Senator Klein and Assemblyman Crespo Team Up to Reduce Obesity in High-Risk Areas Across New York State

JEFFREY D. KLEIN | September 13, 2013

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### **Scaling Back Obesity: Senator Klein and Assemblyman Crespo Team Up to Reduce Obesity in High-Risk Areas Across New York State**

*Lawmakers urge Governor to sign legislation into law that will help reduce obesity, particularly amongst children and adolescents*

**BRONX, NY** – Standing in the backyard of the Bronx YMCA in Castle Hill, Senator Klein and Assemblyman Crespo highlighted three pieces of legislation passed by both houses in the state legislature that aim to reduce obesity in New York. While New York State's obesity rates continue to rise, high-risk areas like the Bronx, which has the highest obesity rate in New York City, have experienced especially high rates of childhood and adolescent obesity, putting the next generation in danger of acquiring Type II Diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. If no action is taken, it is projected that the next generation will have a shorter life span than their parents.

The first bill, S. 2438, aims to increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in areas of New York State with a high-incidence of obesity. The second, S. 2439, expands wellness education programs that combat childhood obesity and supports programs sponsored by

health insurance companies that promote healthy living. The Community Gardens Act, S. 2372, seeks to increase the presence of community gardens throughout the state, providing New Yorkers with more local, wholesome produce. As a legislative package, these bills seek to reduce obesity by addressing a range of issues, detailed in a report on obesity in New York State that was released by Senator Klein's office at the press conference.

Alongside leaders in health care, fitness and community gardening, Senator Klein and Assemblyman Crespo called on Governor Cuomo to sign these three bills into law.

**Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) said,** "The research is clear—nothing poses a greater health risk to our children than obesity. Sadly, Bronx County's obesity rate is well above the New York State average and continues to grow. Making healthy, affordable food options readily available to high-risk communities, while increasing access to physical exercise are critical to reversing this trend. These bills will not only streamline coordination between state agencies to better address obesity, but also will create health food and exercise marketing campaigns targeted at high-risk populations.

"Our legislative package, along with the Teen Health Awareness Campaign, which aims to raise awareness among adolescents about health risks like obesity, will improve the health outcomes for New Yorkers and help to ensure that our next generation develops healthy habits necessary for a stronger future."

"Throughout human history food has been a scarcity. Today and in our state, food insecurity and reliance on food with low nutritional value are common place. Both of these factors combine to make New York a leading state facing an obesity epidemic, especially impacting its children and youth," **said Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo, sponsor of Assembly Bill 2893/Senate Bill 2439.** "With 40% of Latino children ages 2-19 either overweight or obese, compared with 31.7% of all children; with 12% of black teens considered obese, compared to

10% and 7% of their Latino and white peers, respectively; and with 50% of low income children in New York City classified as overweight before they start school, we can unquestionably declare -- Albany, we have a problem! Senator Jeff Klein has raised this health crisis to prominent attention among New York policymakers and his leadership on improving the health of our children and their families brings us here today."

Legislation highlighted at the press conference would call on:

[S.2438]: The Department of Agriculture and Markets and Office of Community Gardens to increase the availability and affordability of locally produced fresh produce to areas of the state with high rates of obesity. This Department of Agriculture and Markets would also be charged with working with the Department of Health to help implement DOH's Childhood Obesity Program and to work with the State Education Department to develop marketing campaigns to promote the consumption of healthful food in schools and in high-risk communities.

[S.2439]: The Department of Health to better inform educators on the incidence, prevention and treatment of obesity among children and adolescents by providing targeted trainings, programs and materials. Additionally, it would call on the Department of Financial Services to expand wellness education programs that combat obesity, while increasing access to these programs for insured patients; and

[S.2372]: The Department of Agriculture & Markets and the Office of Community Gardens to work with local organizations on establishing more community gardens throughout New York State. Furthermore, this legislation would streamline the process of establishing a community garden by developing a single application for groups looking to use vacant land to establish community gardens. Finally, S.2372 would give the Commissioner of Agriculture & Markets the ability to convene a Community Gardens Task Force, bringing together the

most knowledgeable minds on community gardens from relevant state agencies, local communities and private parties.

“In the thirty-nine years that Urban Health Plan has been a part of the Bronx community, obesity has been and continues to be one of the greatest health challenges we face. We are committed to improving access to healthy food and applaud Senator Klein and Assemblyman Crespo for their leadership in making this possible,” **President and CEO of Urban Health Plans Paloma Hernandez said.** “Anything that will give members of our community – particularly our children – better tools to adopt healthy eating habits is critical to combating obesity in the Bronx and across New York.”

“As a longtime fitness expert and personal trainer, I see the impact that years without regular exercise can take on someone. It’s critical for young people to develop healthy exercise habits early on, something that oftentimes develops by following the example set by your parents. Increasing access to comprehensive wellness programs that help adults with stress, nutrition and physical exercise offers adults an effective way of confronting obesity head on. I thank Senator Klein and Assemblyman Crespo for taking action against this epidemic. Our children are our future and it is our responsibility to show them how lifestyle choices impact their health, **said Celebrity Personal Trainer, Donovan Green.**

"The Bronx alone has 163 vacant public lots on 35 acres. As NYC's community land access advocates, we are looking forward to the more predictable process for communities to take control of this precious public resource and turn it into local assets they know they need," **said Paula Z. Segal, Legal Director of 596 Acres' NYC Community Land Access Program.**

**596 Acres and New York City Community Garden Coalition Representative Karen Washington said,** "As an urban farmer and a community activist I have helped Bronx residents convert empty lots into community gardens and urban farms for over 25 years. I have seen first hand the impact this transformation has made in increasing the health, well being and physical

activity amongst Bronx residents. One quick solution in the war against obesity, diabetes and heart disease is growing your own food. I support Senator Klein in his efforts to see that Bronx residents have access to land to grow a healthy vibrant Bronx community."

Senator Klein, along with Assemblyman Crespo, successfully advocated for a Teen Health Awareness Campaign Fund in the 2013-14 New York State budget. The campaign focuses on reducing adolescent obesity, educating students about the health consequences of short and long-term alcohol and substance abuse, and raising awareness among young women and health professionals about endometriosis. In the budget, a "check-off box" will appear on all future state income tax forms and will be dedicated to funding health awareness programs in schools addressing, among other issues, teenage obesity.

At the press conference, bookmarks, encouraging teenagers to fill out a Teen Health Survey were unveiled. The results of this survey will be used by policymakers, educators and health professionals to identify gaps in teen health awareness. Funds gathered through the check-off campaign will be put towards health education in these underserved areas exposed by the survey.

"The YMCA applauds Senator Jeff Klein and Assemblyman Crespo for launching the 'Teen Health Awareness Campaign'. By reaching out directly to youth in youth development settings, like the YMCA, and by encouraging them to better manage their eating and exercise habits, we can directly impact decisions and behavior in ways that can significantly improve life habits, overall health and the self-esteem necessary for them to succeed. The YMCA is thrilled to partner with these legislators in promoting the Teen Health survey and share their vision of a healthier generation," **said Bronx YMCA Teen Coordinator Yoko Lirano.**