



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Governor Cuomo Signs Klein Bills Tackling Childhood Obesity in New York

JEFFREY D. KLEIN December 19, 2013

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ALBANY, NY – Today, Senate Majority Coalition Leader Jeffrey D. Klein (Bronx/Westchester) announced that three of his signature bills aimed at combating the ills of childhood obesity have been signed into law by Governor Cuomo.

The enacted laws were drawn from recommendations made in Senator Klein's eye-opening report, *Childhood Obesity: Mitigation and Prevention in the State of New York*. The bills include S.2438, which aims to increase the availability and affordability of fresh produce to areas of the state with high rates of obesity; S. 2439, which expands wellness education programs that combat childhood obesity and supports programs sponsored by health insurance companies that promote healthy living and; The Community Gardens Act, S.2372, which will increase the number of community gardens throughout the state and provide New Yorkers with easier access to local, fresh produce in their own backyards.

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. These new laws are a great way to help send that rate straight down. I thank Assemblyman Crespo and Governor Cuomo for sponsoring and signing these important bills. These laws 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.”

The original proposals, which were introduced earlier this September alongside Assemblyman Marcos Crespo, focus on tackling New York State's unacceptably high obesity rates, particularly in high-risk areas like the Bronx, which boasts the highest obesity rates in New York City.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), New York's obesity trends have been climbing over the past decade, particularly among minority communities. New York also ranks among some of the worst states when it comes to childhood obesity. The problem is compounded in urban areas where outdoor recreational space is limited and healthy food is less accessible.

"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."

According to the CDC report, the Bronx had the highest prevalence of overweight (16.9%), obese (14.8%), and overweight or obese (31.7%) high school students throughout grades 9-12. These statistics are dangerously much higher than similar rates among New Yorkers statewide and throughout the country.

Senator Klein, along with Assemblyman Crespo and members of the Independent Democratic Conference, 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. In the coming months, Senator Klein will unveil the results of an online Teen Health Survey that was launched as a part of this campaign. Thousands of teenagers across the state have already participated, providing a wide-ranging sample of responses that are expected to highlight specific areas where more funding is needed for health education.

"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."

“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.**