



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Senate Passes Bills to Help Flood Victims

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO January 29, 2014

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UTICA – The New York State Senate has passed four bills aimed at improving response and providing relief to Mohawk Valley residents negatively impacted by flooding.

Senators who represent the Mohawk Valley – Joseph Griffo, James Seward and David Valesky – touted the bills at a news conference today at the State Office Building, Utica.

The package is:

- S5931 (Seward): Enacts the “Mohawk Valley and Niagara county assessment relief act”
- S5985 (Seward): Establishes an income tax credit for flood victims in certain counties
- S5987 (Griffo): Establishes and administers a supplemental state disaster aid program
- S6345 (Valesky): Relates to creating the upstate flood mitigation task force within the Canal Corp.

The bills are in response to multiple floods and storm events throughout last summer, which caused an estimated \$80 million in damage between June 26 and July 3 in the Mohawk Valley alone. All now await Assembly action.

“My colleagues and I heard from many residents, business owners and municipal leaders worried about the cost of recovering from the last summer’s devastating floods,” said Sen. Joseph A. Griffo, R-Rome. “We promised them that we’d learn from this incident and create legislation that would lead to a better response, both here in the Mohawk Valley and statewide. We can’t control the weather, but we can improve the way we prepare and the speed in which we help people get the funds they need to rebuild.”

Senator James L. Seward, R, C, I-Oneonta, said, “Imagine you lost your home and everything you own, then to compound matters, you receive a tax bill for that destroyed property. Rebuilding a home is a monumental task and families and individuals need all the help they can get so they can remain here in the Mohawk Valley. Allowing municipalities to evaluate badly damaged property and offer a reduced tax assessment is a real difference maker.”

Senator David J. Valesky, D-Oneida, said: "Last summer’s floods taught us what we did well and what needed improvement. I am pleased to join my colleagues in sponsoring legislation that will provide relief to those who were affected by last summer’s floods, ensure expeditious relief in case of another event, and study best practices to put together a plan to mitigate damage in the future."

Senator Hugh T. Farley, R-Schenectady, said: “I am pleased to join my Senate colleagues in sponsoring these important bills. I have always been impressed by the way that individuals and organizations quickly pull together and work hard to recover from natural disasters, but they need assistance from the government as well. This bill will ensure that New York State is ready and able to provide the financial assistance that is so crucial to help these communities recover.”

Additional detail on bills:

**S5931 (Seward): Passed 61-0. Assembly sponsor: Anthony J. Brindisi, D-Utica.**

The “Mohawk Valley and Niagara County Assessment Relief Act” provides a property tax reduction for those taxpayers in eligible counties whose property improvements were substantially damaged by the flooding that occurred between June 20 and Aug.9, 2013. To provide assessment relief, a municipality must pass a local law that adopts the provisions of the bill. A school district must pass a resolution.

**S5985 (Seward): Passed 61-0. Assembly sponsor: Anthony J. Brindisi, D-Utica.**

Provides a credit equal to 2013-14 school taxes and 2014 city, village, town and county taxes on any primary residence which received substantial flood damage between June 20 and Aug. 9, 2013. Flood victims must live in Oneida, Herkimer, Madison, Montgomery, Tompkins, Cortland, Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben or Niagara counties.

**S5987 (Griffo): Passed 61-0. Assembly co-sponsor: William D. Magee, D-Nelson.**

It would create a supplemental fund to provide individual assistance, public assistance and hazard mitigation after a natural or man-made disaster. Aid would be available for a variety of disaster-related expenses, including home repairs and medical expenses for individuals. Municipalities would be eligible to receive funds for such items as public services expenses

and debris removal. Infrastructure grants would be available to public schools.

Upon a disaster being declared, the bill would also require the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to establish a field office at the disaster site and provide relief workers. The agency would also create a disaster recovery center and a toll-free phone number to help those affected apply for assistance.

In all instances, grant applicants would receive funds within one month. Loan applicants would receive aid within two months. To ensure the maximum number of people are helped, aid and loans would not be offered to anyone provided money by their insurance company or the federal government.

**S6345 (Valesky): Passed 61-0. Assembly sponsor: Anthony J. Brindisi, D-Utica.**

Establishes the Upstate Flood Mitigation Task Force, a nine-member body comprised of experts in hydrology, civil engineering, climatology, emergency management and soil and water conservation. The group would conduct an in-depth examination of environments and economies that could be negatively impacted by flooding, the cost impact of flooding over the last five years and any procedures in place for flood response.

It would also create an upstate flood mitigation grant program, which would use available federal and state funds to offer grants to prevent and mitigate flood damage.