



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

## Senator Valesky Announces Expansion of Senior Prescription Drug Program in Final NYS Budget

DAVID J. VALESKY March 29, 2014

| ISSUE: **AGING, EPIC (ELDERLY PHARMACEUTICAL INSURANCE COVERAGE PROGRAM), HEALTH CARE, SENIORS**

| COMMITTEE: **AGING**

ALBANY, NY—State Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida), Chair of the Senate Aging Committee, announced the state budget will expand the successful Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) Program to include more than 25,000 more seniors in New York State. Prescription drug rates have increased twice the rate of inflation, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, disproportionately affecting senior citizens, many of whom live on fixed incomes.

"Prescription drugs are one of the most expensive components of health care for seniors," Senator Valesky said. "With the cost of prescription drugs increasing significantly, it is important to expand the EPIC program to provide a safety net for more older New Yorkers."

Currently, the EPIC program assists more than 270,000 income-eligible seniors age 65 and older supplement their out of pocket Medicare Part D drug plan costs. The program has provided prescription drug support to more than 911,000 low and moderate-income senior citizens since its inception in 1987; however, only 35 percent of seniors have received assistance. Eligibility thresholds for EPIC have been capped at \$35,000 for an individual and

\$50,000 for a married couple since 2001. The final budget agreement expands the income threshold to \$75,000 for an individual and \$100,000 for married enrollees. As a result it is estimated that an additional 25,000 New Yorkers will now be eligible for the program.

“AARP thanks Senator Valesky for his leadership in addressing a basic kitchen table economic issue for New York’s seniors,” said Beth Finkel, State Director for AARP in New York State. “With the cost of prescription drugs rising well above inflation in recent years, increasing the income eligibility ceiling for EPIC will help thousands more older New Yorkers obtain life-saving prescription drugs. The importance of this long overdue expansion of the popular and important EPIC program to help keep New York affordable for its seniors can't be underestimated.”

“Including EPIC expansion in the budget was a priority for me,” Senator Valesky said. “I have heard too many stories from senior citizens about the high cost of prescription drugs forcing them to make choices between medication and food or heat; that is unconscionable, and I am confident these changes will provide additional relief.”

The proposal was included in the Independent Democratic Conference's report, "Affordable NY: Making New York More Affordable for Our Seniors," released earlier this month.