



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ted O'Brien

## Senator O'Brien, women's rights advocates announce bill to minimize harmful impact of Hobby Lobby decision

TED O'BRIEN August 18, 2014

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**ROCHESTER, N.Y.** – Senator Ted O'Brien, joined by leading women's rights advocates from the Rochester and Finger Lakes region, announced his co-sponsorship of legislation that would require employers to notify their employees before changing their insurance plans to restrict access to contraception. The bill comes in the wake of the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision allowing corporations to exclude certain forms of contraception from their health care coverage.

“Decisions about using birth control should be made between a woman, her family, and her faith – not her employer,” **Senator O’Brien** said. “Unfortunately, the Supreme Court set a precedent that could cause major disruptions to health care coverage for women across the country. Here in New York, we must take steps to mitigate the negative impact of the Hobby Lobby case by preventing unexpected costs from derailing family budgets and forcing women to make potentially unhealthy choices. This legislation will ensure that employers in our state fully inform women of potential changes to their contraceptive health insurance so they can access the quality care they deserve.”

The US Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* allows closely held corporations to claim exemption from the contraceptive care mandate under federal law. As a result, many employees who would otherwise have contraceptive care and devices covered under their insurance plans will no longer have access through their employer.

[Senate bill S.7928](#), co-sponsored by Senator O’Brien, would require an employer seeking exemption to inform employees 90 days before the change in coverage becomes effective. Failure to comply would subject an employer to a penalty of up to \$5,000 per violation.

Senator O’Brien discussed the new legislation at Susan B. Anthony Park in the City of Rochester at a press conference with a number of local women’s rights leaders and advocates.

**Barbara LeSavoy, Director of Women & Gender Studies at SUNY Brockport and a representative of the American Association of University Women NYS** said: “I thank Senator O’Brien for his leadership in fighting for women’s rights in New York and am proud to support this legislation. The Hobby Lobby decision compromises women’s reproductive freedom and will restrict access to vital contraceptive care across the nation. The disclosure provisions in this bill will help minimize the harmful impact of Hobby Lobby on women and their families here in New York.”

**Maureen N. Polen, Esq., Community & Public Affairs Liaison, Planned Parenthood of Central & Western New York** said: "Contraception is basic health care and any changes in this essential service means women could be hit with unexpected costs resulting in unhealthy consequences for their reproductive health. Senator O'Brien understands that New York State's work force depends on accessible, affordable health care. Unlike the New York State Senate leadership which failed to act proactively to prevent workplace discrimination based on reproductive health, Senator O'Brien is taking action to provide needed safeguards for New York State workers."

**Barbara Moore of the Rochester Chapter of the National Organization for Women** said: "It is demeaning to women to make them jump through hoops to get the proper care they need and to tell them that their employers' beliefs trump their own rights. Senator O'Brien understands that access to affordable birth control is an essential part of comprehensive women's health care. We are grateful to have someone like him in the Senate working every day to improve the lives of women and girls and their families."

**Kaelyn Rich, Director of the Genesee Valley Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union** was also in attendance.

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*Senator O'Brien represents the 55th district in the Senate, which is made up of the eastern half of Monroe County and the western half of Ontario County, including much of the city of Rochester.*

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