



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #26: Let's End Tick-Borne Diseases

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 26, 2014

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Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases are on a sudden, sharp rise in New York, causing a public health concern that has my attention and that of my Senate colleagues.

In St. Lawrence County, the frequency of Lyme disease cases jumped 41 percent in 2013, when compared to the previous three year average. It increased 34 percent in Oneida County and 4 percent in Lewis County.

Statewide, there are more than 450 new cases this year.

The Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases just released a new action plan that should enhance research, diagnosis, treatment and prevention for these tick-borne illnesses. It's backed by a \$500,000 allocation we put in the budget during negotiations.

Here are some of the group's recommendations.

First, let's host a statewide conference and invite all the researchers working on the treatment of Lyme disease. At this conference, attendees would be encouraged to swap data, collaborate on research and learn ways to access federal National Institutes of Health grants.

Second, the Trudeau Institute, Paul Smith's College and Middlebury should pursue a joint initiative on tick-borne disease research, including exploring host-parasite relations, especially in deer, rodent and tick populations.

Third, let's collect more ticks. We need to know which ticks are carrying the disease, so we know where best to deploy any educational messaging. Then we should restart the comprehensive educational campaign we once had for tick-borne diseases. We've already placed new signs in state parks that warn visitors about tick exposure. But we also need to

reach out to pet owners, since our animals often provide transportation for ticks and are victims over diseased tick bites.

Fourth, let's kill ticks. We've protected many white-tailed deer with a "four poster" device that sweeps the animals' neck, head and ears with tick-killing agents while the deer eat. Let's expand the use of that system as well as bait vaccines for animals.

The Legislature recently passed legislation that will help in the final element of the Task Force's recommendation. We need more measures to enhance the diagnosis and treatment for those who are suffering from tick-borne diseases.

Sometimes, however, doctors shy away from recommending potential innovative treatments because they're not popular with the medical community. We're taking the Department of Health's guideline on medical conduct and trying to make it law. It says that practitioners can't be investigated solely because they recommend a treatment that's not universally accepted by their medical profession, especially those used in the treatment of tick-borne diseases.

Our task force has enlisted experts to design a smart, effective course of action for minimizing tick-borne diseases. I am looking forward to building on this progress in the days, weeks and months ahead.