



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## Senator Skelos Appoints Senator Serino the New Chair of Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases

SUE SERINO February 18, 2015

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### **SENATOR SKELOS APPOINTS SENATOR SERINO THE NEW CHAIR OF TASK FORCE ON LYME AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES**

**Senate Will Continue to Examine Ways to Prevent and Address Lyme's Spread Across the State**

New York State Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos today named Senator Sue Serino (R-C-I, Hyde Park) as the new chair of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases.

The Task Force will continue the Senate's focus on improved prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of these diseases to better protect the health of New York residents.

“Senator Serino not only represents a region that has some of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the country, but her family has also been directly affected,” Senator Skelos said. “She will provide the leadership to continue the Senate's efforts to prevent the disease from affecting others and help those already afflicted. I would also like to thank the previous Task Force co-chairs - Senators Hannon, Carlucci, LaValle, and Little - for their successful work in advocating for additional resources for Lyme initiatives and passing a new law that will help increase access to treatments for those who suffer from ongoing symptoms.”

Senator Serino said, “As the mother of a son who has suffered the aggressive symptoms of Lyme and a lifelong resident of the area hardest hit by the disease, I understand first-hand the urgency that we need to put behind this initiative. I made a promise to my constituents that I would be relentless in the fight to eradicate Lyme and I fully intend to fulfill that pledge. I am honored to have the opportunity to chair this critical Task Force.”

Senator Skelos also announced the Task Force members, who include: Senator George A. Amedore, Jr. (R-C-I, Rotterdam), Senator John Bonacic (R-C-I, Mount Hope), Senator Phil Boyle (R-C-I, Suffolk County), Senator David Carlucci (D, Rockland/Westchester), Senator Thomas Croci (R, Sayville), Senator Hugh Farley (R-C, Schenectady), Senator John Flanagan (R-C-I, East Northport), Senator Kemp Hannon (R, Nassau), Senator William Larkin (R-C, Cornwall-on-Hudson), Senator Kenneth LaValle (R-C-I, Port Jefferson), Senator Elizabeth Little (R-C-I, Queensbury), Senator Carl Marcellino (R, Syosset), Senator Michael Nozzolio (R-C, Fayette), Senator Thomas O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats), Senator Kathleen Marchione (R-C, Halfmoon), Senator Patricia Ritchie (R-C, Heuvelton), and Senator Cathy Young (R-I-C, Olean).

**Lyme disease** is a potentially debilitating and life-threatening illness and its outbreak initially centered on Long Island and the Hudson Valley. According to the state Department of Health (DOH), over 95,000 cases have been confirmed in New York State since 1986, and the disease has been reported in every region of the state. The Task Force will be working to address the geographic expansion of tick-borne illnesses in New York by taking a comprehensive approach that examines ways to encourage detection and prevention initiatives, and facilitates diagnostic and treatment advancements.

In October 2013, the Senate created the Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases led by former co-chairs Senator Hannon, Senator Carlucci, Senator LaValle, and Senator Little. Task Force members reviewed research, consulted with experts, heard from the public, worked to

develop legislation, and advocated for additional resources to address the spread of Lyme in New York, which culminated in the creation of a comprehensive [report](#) with 19 recommendations.

One of the legislative accomplishments that came from the Task Force's work was the adoption of [S7854](#) sponsored by Senator Hannon, Chairman of the Senate Health Committee. The new law will help people who may benefit from innovative and effective alternative medical treatment. It prevents the state from charging medical professionals with misconduct when the sole issue is providing or recommending treatment for Lyme and other illnesses that is not universally accepted by the medical community.

Another Task Force recommendation included the creation of a learning collaborative to partner counties in the state that have been at the epicenter of the Lyme epidemic with counties that are just beginning to experience outbreaks. DOH recently announced that it is hosting a Tick-Borne Disease County Learning Collaborative meeting on February 25-26 in Rensselaer County to encourage the sharing of best practices for surveillance, investigation, and education. The report also recommended convening a statewide conference to bring together state health officials and the research community at universities and institutes across New York, which has been scheduled for March 24-25 in Albany. To support the Task Force recommendations, the Senate succeeded in including \$500,000 in the FY 2015 state budget, as well as an additional \$100,000 for the state's disease elimination and reduction efforts.

This session's Task Force will build upon funding secured last year, promote the ongoing implementation of the report's recommendations, and continue outreach to identify issues needing to be addressed in the prevention, detection, and treatment of tick-borne illnesses in New York.

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