Senator Hoylman Hails Passage of His Bill to Allow Life-Saving Meningitis Vaccination at Pharmacies

BRAD HOYLMAN   June 21, 2013

*IN MIDST OF DEADLY OUTBREAK AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN
S.4881A/A.7324A WILL EXPAND ACCESS TO VACCINE*

Albany, NY – Today, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman (D, WFP-Manhattan) announced the passage of his legislation (S.4881A/A.7324A) to expand access to meningitis vaccines in the midst of an alarming and deadly outbreak of the disease among men who have sex with men (MSM).

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), 22 cases of meningitis among MSM have been reported since 2010, including 17 cases since 2012, seven of which were fatal. The legislation, which is carried in the Assembly by Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell, authorizes licensed pharmacists who have received additional certification, as well as certified nurse practitioners, to administer meningococcal vaccinations to adults 18 years of age and older.

"Allowing pharmacists to administer the meningitis vaccine will help us stop a wider outbreak of this deadly disease which is evolving into a serious public health concern for the NYC LGBT community" said Senator Hoylman. "The best way to prevent illness and death from meningitis is to be vaccinated. As we've seen with the flu vaccine, when pharmacists

have the authority to administer a vaccine, immunization rates increase."

Dr. Thomas Farley, Commissioner of NYC DOHMH, said, "Allowing pharmacists to offer vaccination against meningitis will save lives and pave the way for even greater access to vaccinations to fight childhood flu and other communicable diseases. I want to thank Senator Hoylman, Senator LaValle, Assembly Member O'Donnell and Assembly Member Glick for passing this important piece of legislation."

"Passage of this legislation is a tremendous step in our effort to contain the spread this potentially fatal disease," said New York City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn. "Early on in the outbreak, advocates identified access to the meningitis vaccine as a significant obstacle. I applaud Senator Hoylman for introducing this legislation to increase access by allowing pharmacists to administer the immunizing agents, and am grateful to both him and Assembly Member O'Donnell for securing its passage."

"Experts say that this strain of meningitis is so insidious that it could suddenly mushroom into a major outbreak, and an article published just this week in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* noted that health professionals are urging gay men visiting New York for Pride Month get vaccinated," said Senator Hoylman. "In the city, there are numerous anecdotal reports of at-risk men encountering obstacles to getting vaccinated at places like health clinics, hospitals and private doctors' offices. This legislation will address this deficiency in the health care delivery system."

Senator Hoylman continued, "I'm thankful to my colleagues in the State Senate, including Senators LaValle and Hannon, for recognizing the urgency of this bill and particularly to Commissioner Farley and DOHMH and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn for their help in securing its passage. I'm also thankful to my friends and colleagues Daniel O'Donnell, the

bill's lead sponsor in Assembly, and Deborah Glick, who passed the bill in their house last night, and I'm optimistic that Governor Cuomo will sign it into law."

This legislation is one of the many efforts Senator Hoylman is pursuing to help combat the meningitis outbreak, including: Spearheading a successful effort to recruit Adam4Adam.com, one of the largest online hookup sites, to send a warning to its NYC area users regarding the meningitis outbreak; successfully working with the NYS Department of Financial Services to direct private insurers to provide notification about vaccine coverage; organizing an informational meeting with Brooklyn State Legislators and DOHMH; and assisting New York City Council Speaker Quinn on a health briefing for community leaders.