



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Griffo: End-of-session legislation helps restore public trust, offers path toward progress in NY

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 20, 2016

| ISSUE: **PENSION FORFEITURE, ETHICS REFORM, COMBATING HEROIN AND OPIOID ADDICTION, BREAST CANCER, UNFUNDED MANDATES**

ALBANY – State Senator Joseph Griffo on Saturday announced a series of end-of-session legislation that addresses a wide variety of issues, including ethics reform, quality-of-life concerns and the heroin crisis.

“From fighting heroin and encouraging early detection of breast cancer, to tackling unfunded mandates and holding public officials accountable, this Legislative session has accomplished a great deal toward improving the lives of our citizens and their communities,” **said Senator Griffo (R-Rome)**. “I believe the end of this session shows that we listened to the public’s concerns, we acknowledged problems that exist, and we worked together to find effective solutions that will continue to move New York State in a positive direction.”

**The following are some of the highlights that were approved in the final days of the 2016-2017 Legislative session:**

**ETHICS REFORM:** In taking steps to restore the public’s trust in its state government, the Legislature passed a series of ethics reforms that would require elected officials and

policymakers to forfeit their pension if they are convicted of a crime related to their public office. These measures would also toughen election and lobbying laws, including prohibiting any coordination between candidates and independent spending groups.

**BREAST CANCER SCREENING AND TREATMENT:** These measures will encourage the early detection of breast cancer by extending hours for screening at certain hospital-based mammography facilities, while eliminating burdensome insurance hurdles for mammograms and other diagnostic imaging procedures.

**COMBATING HEROIN EPIDEMIC:** This package of legislation enacts a thoughtful, proactive approach to the state's rapidly evolving heroin and opioid crisis by: expanding insurance coverage for addiction treatment; enhancing treatment options; empowering professionals to administer emergency assistance to individuals; enhancing data collection and reporting on heroin and opioid overdoses; requiring hospitals to educate individuals about available treatment services; requiring prescriber education; and providing insurance coverage for necessary inpatient services for the diagnosis and treatment of substance use disorder.

**FUNDING INDIGENT LEGAL SERVICES:** Currently, each county in New York is responsible for funding legal services for people in criminal and family court who cannot afford an attorney. The quality and effectiveness of these legal services, however, varies from county to county, often depending upon the availability of funding. But with this new legislation, the state would gradually take over full funding of indigent legal services programs by 2023. By requiring the state to reimburse localities for these vital legal services, this legislation aims to ensure equal access to quality legal counsel for all New Yorkers, while relieving fiscally-stressed counties of expensive unfunded mandates.

**PREVENTING BLIGHT OF ZOMBIE PROPERTIES:** Bank-owned foreclosed properties – also known as ‘zombie properties’ – pose a significant threat to the economic health and public safety of local communities by driving down property values and serving as hotbeds for criminal activity. These provisions will help prevent people from losing their homes, and combat the blight of abandoned ‘zombie properties’ by expediting the rehabilitation, repair and improvement of these properties. Among the measures: imposing a pre-foreclosure duty on banks and servicers to maintain vacant and abandoned properties; improving the efficiency and integrity of the mandatory settlement conferences to better protect homeowners facing foreclosure; creating a toll free hotline for people to report potentially vacant and abandoned properties; establishing an electronic database of vacant and abandoned properties to be maintained by the State Department of Financial Services; creating an expedited foreclosure process for vacant and abandoned properties; and establishing a Consumer Bill of Rights informing property owners of their rights in foreclosure proceedings to prevent people from losing their homes.

**TESTING FOR LEAD IN SCHOOLS:** Schools in New York are not currently required to test their drinking water for lead, or to notify parents or government officials of results. In order to prevent this dangerous exposure to young children, this measure will make New York the first state in the nation to require periodic testing of drinking water in schools and the reporting of results to parents, as well as local and state entities. It will also provide guidance for remediation to ensure the availability of clean and safe drinking water in every school.

**UPDATING ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL LAWS:** This would modernize New York’s 80-year-old liquor laws by allowing bars and restaurants to now serve alcohol starting at 10 a.m. on Sundays, instead of noon. Restaurants may also request a special permit to serve alcohol for special occasions starting at 8 a.m., but no more than 12 times a year. Additional provisions will also reduce burdensome fees for wineries, distilleries, breweries and cideries

across the state.

**IMPROVING SAFETY AT RAIL CROSSINGS:** These measures would reduce the risk of collisions between trains and motor vehicles at grade crossings by requiring coordinated, frequent inspections of traffic control devices at highway-rail crossings, and by imposing penalties on railroad companies and repeat offender drivers who continue to disobey the law.

**ADDITIONAL CAPITAL FUNDING FOR SUNY SCHOOLS:** An additional \$50 million in funding will be provided for capital projects on SUNY and CUNY campuses, beyond the state's contribution of \$403 million to the universities' capital budgets for 2017.

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