



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Ritchie Legislation Encouraging Outdoor Environmental Education Signed into Law

PATTY RITCHIE September 14, 2017



State Senator Patty Ritchie is announcing her bill (S.3019) that directs the state to study and develop a long-term strategy on outdoor environmental education and recreation that not only gets children outside, but also shows them just how much fun it can be, has been signed into law.

The measure was prompted by recent studies that showed the average child spends more than seven hours each day in front of an electronic screen—and only seven minutes playing

outside. This trend has had a profound impact on the health and wellness of our state's youth. The correlations between childhood obesity rates and the decline in outdoor recreation is undeniable.

Under the new law, Commissioners of both the Department of Health and the Department of Environmental Conservation will study issues like childhood obesity rates, economic trends and their impact on access to outdoor spaces as well as other factors. This research will lead to a state-level blueprint that encourages outdoor education and recreation.

The bill passed the Senate unanimously. Thanks to the hard work of Assembly sponsor, Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, it also passed the Assembly. Tuesday, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed it into law.

"I think we have all seen, first-hand, just how much time our children spend on their cell phones, computers and in front of the television playing video games. The negative impact it has on the health and overall energy of our youth is tremendous," Senator Ritchie said. "I'm thrilled to open the door to a step in the right direction. It's the kind of kick-start we need to get our kids excited to put down the phone and eager to get outside to both learn and play."

"One of the most beautiful sounds in the world is children running and playing outdoors," Assemblywoman Gunther added. "But if we're not careful, the sounds of children playing will someday just be the beeps and clicks of electronics. That's why this legislation is so important—kids can't fall in love with nature, sunshine and physical activity if they don't have a space to do so. I am so pleased that this is finally law."

After gathering the information and developing the strategy, the commissioners will submit a report of their findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation to the Senate, Assembly and Governor.