



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## SERINO AND HANNON URGE STATE TO STUDY LINK BETWEEN LYME DISEASE AND MENTAL ILLNESS

SUSAN SERINO March 29, 2018

| ISSUE: **LYME AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES, MENTAL HEALTH**

| COMMITTEE: **TASK FORCE ON LYME AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES**



ALBANY, NY—In the ongoing battle against Lyme and Tick-borne Diseases (TBD), Senators Sue Serino and Kemp Hannon are urging the state to consider the impact that these infections may have on mental health. Their bill that would require the state to study the link between infectious diseases, blood-borne pathogens and mental illnesses passed in the Senate today, marking the first step in a process that could lead to better understanding of

the incredible impact these diseases can have on the overall health of New Yorkers.

*“As someone who lost a brother to suicide, you always wonder what outside forces may have been at play,” said Senator Serino, who Chairs the Senate’s Task Force on Lyme and TBDs. “I always say that education is the key to prevention, and after hearing from countless Lyme sufferers about the mental anguish so many have suffered, it is critical that we lead the way in understanding the relationship between the two. Armed with the kind of data this study could provide, we can work to more effectively empower patients and practitioners and ensure that those who may be suffering can access critical treatment.”*

*Senator Kemp Hannon, Chair of the Senate Health Committee, said, “While knowledge of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases has been available for many years, far too many people continue to suffer the effects of these illnesses. The mental health impacts these illnesses may have, needs further research. I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this legislation, and I commend Senator Serino, Chair of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and TBDs, and her tireless efforts to combat this epidemic.”*

In August of 2017, Senators Serino and Hannon held a comprehensive public hearing to look critically at the state’s response to the Lyme and TBD epidemic. It was there that testimony was given by patients, public health experts and mental health professionals that indicated that psychiatric symptoms related to Lyme and TBDs could directly impact quality of life and long-term health of patients if not properly addressed. Patients described battles with mood disorders, anxiety, depression and other mental health related issues. However, witnesses also testified that because health care providers and advocates may not immediately connect mental health issues with the emergence of these diseases, too often these symptoms go unchecked or are ultimately attributed to other causes leading to ineffective treatment and stigmatization.

It became abundantly clear that this is an area where the state can make improvements to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the issue to help empower both patients and medical professionals.

Given the prevalence of TBDs in New York State, Senators Serino and Hannon have urged state leaders to develop a comprehensive statewide action plan to effectively address the spread, and understanding the mental health consequences of these types of infections can play a critical role on that front. Information gathered could be vital to the way in which diagnosis and treatment are approached by health care practitioners, and inform medical debates about the causes of mental health illnesses in infectious disease patients.

Specifically, their bill ([S. 7171](#)) would require the Office of Mental Hygiene, in conjunction with the Department of Health, to conduct an impact study to consider how infectious diseases and blood-borne pathogens like Lyme and TBDs, may correlate with mental health issues in infected individuals. The bill would require the study to be submitted by October 1, 2019.

The bill is sponsored by bi-partisan members of the Senate's Task Force on Lyme and TBDs, who represent unique districts across the state from Western NY to Staten Island.

**Senator George Amedore (Rotterdam)** said, “Lyme Disease, tick-borne illnesses, and other infectious diseases can cause great physical, emotional and financial damage. This study will help gather important information that will lead to improved outcomes and better diagnosis and treatment.”

**Senator Tony Avella (D—Bayside)** said, “Throughout our state there is a prevalence of certain infectious diseases and, unfortunately, our state has not done a good job taking a serious look at the deeper consequences of these diseases. Not all of the effects are visible or skin deep, and many times these infections can develop into a number of mental health conditions. It is crucial that we study this epidemic in order to help physicians and health care practitioners better approach diagnosis and treatment of these conditions and that is why I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this great piece of legislation.”

**Senator John Bonacic (R/C/I-Mt, Hope)** said, “I’m pleased to co-sponsor this legislation which builds on the Senate Republican Conference’s commitment to combatting the spread of Lyme and tick-borne diseases throughout New York State. This bill will provide for an important study of mental health impacts of infectious diseases and blood borne pathogens, and I thank Senator Serino and my colleagues on the Lyme and tick-borne diseases task force for their continued leadership on this important issue.”

**Senator Pam Helming (Canandaigua)** said, “Lyme disease is a growing public health issue across the state. As Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, I have worked to highlight the impact that Lyme and other tick-borne diseases have on farmers. After hearing

directly from patients, advocates, doctors and scientists, it is clear that there are still too many unanswered questions about the toll these diseases take on individuals. Further research will provide the public with the most accurate, up-to-date information. I am proud to be member of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-borne Diseases and thank my colleague Senator Serino for her leadership on this important issue. I am hopeful the Governor will join us in giving farmers and families the tools and information they need to protect themselves."

**Senator Chris Jacobs said,** "Early diagnosis is critical to improving outcomes for patients with Lyme disease, yet it remains one of the most difficult challenges in our fight against the spread of this disease. The study called for in this legislation will help healthcare providers better understand the relationship between Lyme and tick borne diseases and mental health, while highlighting the important role mental health professionals can play in identifying and treating infectious diseases."

**Senator Bill Larkin (R,C,I – Cornwall-On-Hudson) said,** ““We must make sure that no stone is left unturned when it comes to researching Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Through this legislation, we will have the opportunity to learn more about the unique problems people face in dealing with their respective illnesses and the impact it has on their families and our communities.”

**Senator Betty Little (R-C-I, Queensbury) said,** “I know people who have suffered from Lyme disease and, along with the symptoms that are typical and well-known, mental health issues

seem to sometimes also occur, particularly when the disease is undiagnosed and untreated. The point of this legislation is to coordinate research between two state agencies and to see where and when mental health issues are impacted by or are a result of tick-borne disease. Research will inform the medical community as well as the public about how the tick-borne disease can impact a patient in ways that might not be so apparent or easy to understand. I am hopeful we will see better outcomes for patients as a result.”

**Senator Kathy Marchione (R,C,I,Reform-Halfmoon) said,** “ Lyme disease continues impacting so many of our fellow New Yorkers and countless communities across the state. Continuing to meet this public health challenge requires our study of the link between infectious diseases, blood-borne pathogens and mental illnesses. The measure that we passed today will do this and ultimately lead to an improved understanding of the devastating impact these diseases have on the health and well-being of our fellow New Yorkers. I am proud to support this important effort.”

**Senator Tom O'Mara (R, C, I-Big Flats) said,** "We've taken important actions over the past few years to broaden the state's overall response to the spread of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases, but much more needs to be done, particularly in the areas of reporting, testing and treatment, as well as education and awareness. I'm grateful to co-sponsor and help fight for the enactment of this legislation to strengthen New York's overall strategy.”

**Senator Elaine Phillips (Mineola) said,** “As the tick population continues to grow across Long Island and the state, it is important that we explore the correlation of Lyme and other tick-

borne diseases with mental health. Understanding the potential links is important for our health care professionals to properly diagnose and treat this devastating disease that continues to debilitate tens of thousands of residents across our state. As a member of the Task Force, I am pleased to sponsor this measure, and others which address this growing health issue.”

**Senator Patty Ritchie (R, C, I – Ogdensburg) said,** “This bill will help ensure we are doing the best we can to study mental illness and it's connection to another very prevalent issue here in New York State, Lyme and tick-borne diseases. By better understanding the link between the two, we can connect our health care providers with critical information on how to better diagnose and treat patients.

**Senator Diane Savino (Staten Island, Brooklyn) said,** “The results from the study created by this legislation will provide new mental health based information to assist medical and other related professionals who work in this field, to better understand and find new treatment options for those suffering from Lyme and other infectious diseases and blood-borne pathogens. I applaud Sen. Serino for introducing this bill and I'm happy to support it.”

**Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I/Ref-Oneonta) said,** “The Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases has performed groundbreaking work and helped focus the spotlight on tick-borne illnesses. We know more today than ever before about these debilitating ailments and are making strides in prevention and treatment. Studying Lyme in relation to mental health is a logical step forward that can lead to improved diagnosis and treatment plans that can

improve patient outcomes in the short and long-term.”

**Senator Jim Tedisco, (R,C,I,REF-Glenville),** “This legislation is an important step to helping better understand the linkage between Lyme Disease and other tick-borne diseases and mental health so our medical professionals can better diagnose and treat this condition which has had such a devastating impact on many people in New York State. I want to thank Senator Sue Serino for introducing this measure, which I’m co-sponsoring, to help address this serious public health crisis.”

**Senator David Valesky (D, I—Oneida) said,** “With the increasing prevalence of Lyme disease across the state, it is imperative that the medical community have all the necessary information to treat the effects of Lyme disease including possible mental illness.”

The bill passed unanimously in the Senate and has been sent to the Assembly where it is sponsored by Assemblymember Aileen Gunther, who Chairs the Assembly’s Mental Health Committee.