



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elaine Phillips

Senator Phillips Urges State To Study Link Between Lyme Disease And Mental Illness

ELAINE PHILLIPS April 5, 2018



Senator Elaine Phillips, a member of the Senate's Task Force on Lyme and Tick-borne Diseases, announced the passage of legislation requiring a study on the link between Lyme and Tick-borne Diseases (TBD) and mental health.

"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," Senator Phillips said. "Unfortunately, we all know someone who has been affected by this

debilitating disease and the chronic condition can present complex and severe symptoms. Understanding the potential links is important for our health care professionals to properly diagnose and treat this devastating illness which continues to effect the lives of tens of thousands of New York residents.”

The bill (S7171), which Senator Phillips is sponsoring, 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.

A comprehensive public hearing to look critically at the state’s response to the Lyme and TBD epidemic was held in August 2017. At the public hearing, patients, public health experts and mental health professionals provided testimonies 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.

As a result of the public meeting, the group concluded the state can make improvements to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the issue to help empower both patients and medical professionals.

The measure was recently advanced from the Assembly’s Mental Health Committee and is pending in Ways and Means.