



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Senate approves legislation O'Mara co-sponsors to combat Lyme and tick-borne diseases: Legislation follows recommendations of Senate Task Force

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 16, 2018

| ISSUE: **LYME AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES**



Important actions have been taken over the past few years to strengthen the state's overall response to spread of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases but much more needs to be done, particularly in the areas of reporting, testing and treatment, and education and awareness.

**Albany, N.Y., May 16**—The state Senate today approved legislation co-sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), a member of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne

Diseases (TBDs), to significantly increase reporting and enhance critical research, education, and awareness initiatives.

“We’ve taken important actions over the past few years to strengthen the state’s overall response to spread of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases but much more needs to be done, particularly in the areas of reporting, testing and treatment, and education and awareness. These new proposals would greatly strengthen New York’s short- and long-term strategies,” said O’Mara.

At a task force hearing last summer, State Health Commissioner Howard Zucker testified that while over 8,000 cases of Lyme and TBDs are reported annually in New York, “there are undoubtedly many more cases, particularly of Lyme disease, that are treated by community physicians and are not reported, or do not meet the case definition.”

The legislation O’Mara co-sponsors would:

- > require the state Health Department to work with health care providers and experts to develop a standard protocol and patient notification for the diagnosis and treatment of Lyme and TBDs (**S6926**);

- > create a pilot program for Lyme and TBD testing in children (**S7169**). The proposed program would facilitate the ability of children with certain diagnoses that show symptoms similar to Lyme and other TBDs to be voluntarily tested for TBDs. Experts note that children between the ages of 5 to 7 have the highest rate of contracting Lyme disease. Targeting at-risk populations can help ensure early diagnosis and treatment; and

- > improve post-mortem reporting of Lyme and TBDs (**S7168**). Those responsible for conducting post-mortem examinations would be required to report to the state Department of Health (DOH) any time they discover that the deceased individual was afflicted with

Lyme or any TBD at the time of death. This reporting will help improve the accuracy of Lyme and TBDs statistics.

The Senate also approved legislation ([S7242](#)) requiring Lyme and tick-borne disease warning signs at all state-managed parks including trail entryways and campgrounds, and legislation (S8539) to require the state Department of Financial Services to examine the current scope of health insurance coverage for Lyme and tick-borne diseases in New York, and initiatives in other states, and issue a report on alternatives for enhancing coverage in New York State.

Earlier this year, the Senate unanimously approved legislation ([S7171](#)) O'Mara also co-sponsors to create a "Mental Health Impacts Report" requiring the state to conduct an impact study considering how infectious diseases and blood-borne pathogens, including Lyme and TBDs, may have correlations with mental illness in infected individuals. The new report would enable better treatment of the mental health consequences associated with these infections.

O'Mara said that the Senate's latest legislative package is a product of recommendations first made in a Task Force report released last October, "Ticking Time Bomb: An Update on the Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Epidemic in New York State." The full Senate report can be viewed [HERE](#).

The task force is meeting at the Capitol today.