



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara, task force members urge state Health Department to study new species of tick recently found in New York State

THOMAS F. O'MARA August 1, 2018

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**Elmira, N.Y., August 1**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and other members of the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases (TBDs) are urging the state Department of Health (DOH) to study a potentially dangerous tick species recently found for the first time in New York State.

O'Mara and his colleagues are targeting the recent discovery of the Longhorned tick, *Haemaphysalis longicornis*, in downstate Westchester County – the first time this species of tick has been discovered in the state. The tick is not native to the United States but has now been found in New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and Arkansas, in addition to New York.

In a July 25 letter to state Health Commissioner Howard Zucker, O'Mara and his Senate colleagues wrote, “The presence in New York of this particular species raises public health concerns related to the potential spread of Lyme disease and other associated tick borne diseases to individuals and companion animals. Additionally, the Longhorned tick poses a threat to our state’s agricultural economic markets as this species has been recognized as a disease vector that may infect livestock. Infected livestock may exhibit fatigue, reduced milk production, and in instances of mass infections, death. With New York already ranking third in 2016 in confirmed cases of Lyme disease, and third in 2017 among all states in milk production, these concerns require a more in-depth look to protect the people of our State as well as our agricultural economic interests.”

O'Mara and his colleagues are calling on the DOH to conduct a study examining:

- > the extent to which this new species has, and is predicted, to spread throughout the state due to the fact that this species is able to reproduce asexually, and further it appears to be well suited to survive New York’s cold weather winter climate;
- > the health risks the tick poses to people, companion animals, and livestock;
- > improvements to the manner and methods that physicians and veterinarians use to report the discovery of this particular tick; and
- > strategies for eradicating this particular tick from the state.

The results of the study would heighten awareness and education, publicize areas where the ticks may be found, and provide valuable information to local communities concerning increased activity related to the species that could help reduce infections, that lawmakers said.

In addition to the risks it could pose to humans, the Longhorn tick is especially dangerous to cattle. It transmits a disease called Theileriosis, which can cause severe anemia or death. Infected livestock show symptoms including fever, lack of appetite, dehydration, weakness and labored breathing. They may also experience reduced milk production.

In their July 25 letter, the legislators also note that the Senate Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, established in 2013, “has long led the way in raising critical awareness to help New Yorkers protect themselves and to secure funding to advance crucial data collection activities throughout the state..When New Yorkers were threatened by new discoveries of the Powassan Virus last year, your Department rightfully amped up tick collection efforts in the affected area to garner an immediate understanding of the scope of the problem and to more effectively address it. We urge you once again model those efforts and ensure that a new and immediate emphasis is placed on combating the spread of this new species here in Westchester County and beyond.”