



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Senate Majority Takes Action On Measles Outbreak

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS June 13, 2019

| ISSUE: **RELIGIOUS EXEMPTIONS**

Albany, NY- The Senate Democratic Majority today will pass legislation that will combat the ongoing measles epidemic and protect the health of New York's most vulnerable residents. This legislative package is in response to the most significant measles outbreak in over 25 years. The measles was officially declared eliminated in 2000, thanks to a highly effective vaccination campaign. Unfortunately, there has been a recurrence of the measles, particularly among unvaccinated individuals, which threatens the health of New York residents. To address this epidemic, the Senate Majority advanced bills to end religious exemption excuses to vaccinations and to raise awareness about the safety of immunizations.

"Vaccines save lives. We are in the midst of a measles epidemic which is completely preventable given proper immunizations," Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said. "The fact that New York State has the overwhelming majority of these measles cases is shameful, and we must step up to protect New Yorkers' health. The legislation advanced by the Senate Majority will help save lives and ensure that preventable diseases do not become epidemics in our state. I thank the bill sponsors Senator Hoylman, Senator Carlucci, and Senator Montgomery for their bold leadership on this critical issue."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been 1,022 cases of measles in 22 states. As of June 10, there have been 588 confirmed cases in New York City and 334 confirmed cases of measles elsewhere in New York State, including 266 in Rockland County, 43 in Orange County, 18 in Westchester County, 7 in Sullivan County, 1 in Suffolk County and 1 in Greene County. This means that over 90% of measles cases in the United States are in New York State. This fact reinforces the need for state government to take decisive action to protect the health of New Yorkers.

Bill Sponsor, Senator Brad Hoylman said, “Today, the State Senate is sending a strong message to New Yorkers that vaccines are safe and effective. We’re putting science ahead of misinformation about vaccines and standing up for the rights of immunocompromised children and adults, pregnant women and infants who can’t be vaccinated through no fault of their own. With our actions today, we can help avoid future outbreaks of vaccine-preventable illnesses like measles. I’m exceedingly grateful to the leadership of Senate Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my Senate colleagues for their support of our legislation ending non-medical exemptions for vaccinations in New York.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator David Carlucci said, “Ending non-medical vaccine exemptions will get more people vaccinated and help stop the spread of the Measles. This is about public safety and following science. Vaccines save lives, and not one single organized religion denounces vaccines. We cannot allow misinformation based on junk science to fuel anti-vaccine sentiment. This is why the State must also develop a long term vaccine awareness campaign to educate low vaccination communities before outbreaks like this happen.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Velmanette Montgomery said, “Families across New York are diverse and unique and many no longer conform to the traditional sense of biological relations. Legal custodians are responsible for the health, welfare, and safety of their child and these custodians deserve the same rights as biological parents to make important decisions

regarding their family. This bill will empower thousands of legal custodians to raise their family without any limitations on exercising their rights as parents. I am proud to sponsor this bill and modernize how the State of New York defines parental relationships.”

The legislation being passed by the Senate Democratic Majority includes:

- **Eliminating Religious Exemptions:** This bill, S.2994-A, sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman, will repeal New York’s religious exemption for vaccination requirements.
- **Establishing the New York State Vaccination Awareness Campaign:** This bill, S.5136-B, sponsored by Senator David Carlucci, will direct the state’s Department of Health to promote and maintain the New York State vaccination awareness campaign.
- **Modernizing the Definition of a Person in a Parental Relationship:** This bill, S.4475, sponsored by Senator Velmanette Montgomery, will expand state law to recognize caregivers with lawful orders of custody as parents. This will empower tens of thousands of legal custodians throughout the state with the appropriate health, immunization, and education responsibilities essential for caregiving.

Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris said, “Vaccines do not cause illnesses, they prevent them. Serious ailments like measles are on the rise due to decreasing use of vaccinations. These are facts proven by science. I am proud the Senate is taking this step to keep children safe from preventable diseases.”

Senator Jamaal Bailey said, “Vaccinating our younger New Yorkers is vital for public health. We have recently seen the devastating effects that can occur when children aren’t vaccinated. I want to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues, Senators Hoylman, Carlucci, and Montgomery for their leadership on this issue. This package of legislation would eliminate religious exemptions for vaccination, create an

awareness campaign, and would modernize the parental relationship definition to empower legal guardians with the appropriate health, immunization, and education responsibilities.”

Senator Alessandra Biaggi said, “When we rely on scientific fact, the conclusion is simple: vaccinations save lives. If everyone is vaccinated, then every New Yorker – from the youngest to the oldest – is protected from contracting life-threatening diseases. I am a strong supporter of this legislative package to expand vaccination requirements and awareness, because I am a strong supporter of keeping our communities safe and healthy.”

Senator Liz Krueger said, “When it comes to public health policy, our primary responsibility as legislators is to keep New York families safe. That means relying on the best science, thorough research, and proven medical practice. The science is clear: vaccines are safe. This is not a religious issue, it is a health issue, and the needs of public health are paramount, particularly those of children and other vulnerable people who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. I commend my colleagues in the Senate for passing this bill today.”

Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, “The bills we passed today are a response to the public health crises and the need to control the spread of the measles virus through education and the elimination of the religious exemption while retaining the medical exemption. This is the most effective response to manage the rapid spread of measles and to protect New Yorkers. In the past, I have been respectful of genuine religious objections to vaccinations. However, due to the growing need to address this public health crises, we must do more to protect vulnerable New Yorkers, especially children and seniors. The New York State School Boards Association, the NYS Council of School Superintendents, and the NYS PTA support the elimination of the religious exemption for vaccinations.”

Senator Jen Metzger said, “Unvaccinated children put at great risk children and adults who are immunocompromised, pregnant women, infants, and seniors and it is my responsibility

as a legislator to reduce public health risks and save lives. As the representative for several counties that are experiencing outbreaks of measles, I support this package of legislation as a way to best protect children, as well as adults and seniors in our communities.”

Senator Roxanne J. Persaud said, “Children in New York, throughout the nation and across the world depend on adults to care for them. Our responsibility to keep kids safe and healthy includes vaccinations which are proven to be crucial in preventing a child from serious illness as well as spreading avoidable diseases. I commend my colleagues in the Senate for pushing legislation with the best interests of the health and well-being of our youth in mind.”

Senator Jessica Ramos said, “Vaccines are the most studied, understood, and effective medical advancements ever achieved. I am voting yes today to protect my children and all of New York’s children from deadly diseases that we have eradicated. These bills will allow us to eradicate its resurgence.”

Senator Gustavo Rivera said, “While I understand that there are parents across the State that have concerns or religious objections to having their child vaccinated, as Chair of the Senate Health Committee, my main responsibility is to protect our State’s public health. By setting stronger, more uniform statewide vaccination standards and further educating New Yorkers about the effectiveness of immunizations, we are taking action to protect our communities’ public health in the midst of the dangerous measles outbreak which has affected hundreds of New Yorkers. I strongly believe that this is the most prudent option for families and communities across New York State.”

Senator James Skoufis said, “The clock is ticking, outbreaks are rising, and here in the state Senate, we are doing something about it. Vaccines save lives, and unless there is a legitimate medical reason why someone can’t be vaccinated, immunizations ought to be

required if that individual wants to be in public spaces. I'm proud that we took this step today and followed the scientific consensus to ensure the public's health is protected."

Senator Kevin Thomas said, "New York is experiencing its worst measles outbreak in decades. This is a reminder of the challenges we face in this age, as we grapple with social media's role in shaping public opinion during a health crisis. It is our responsibility as lawmakers to ensure that we take responsible action, not only to combat misinformation, but to protect the health and well-being of all New Yorkers. Scientific evidence and medical experts overwhelmingly support the benefits of vaccination. Vaccination gives us the power to protect ourselves, our children, and our neighbors from highly contagious, potentially life-threatening diseases. I am grateful to my colleagues in the State Legislature for recognizing the importance of this legislation in protecting the health of everyone in our state."

Kathryn S. Wylde, President & CEO of the Partnership for New York City, said, "In passing legislation to eliminate non-medical exemptions to vaccination requirements, the Senate majority has put New Yorkers' public health and safety first. As the measles outbreak illustrates, it's vital that this bill becomes law quickly."

Dr. Art Fougner, President of the Medical Society of the State of New York, said, "We applaud the Legislature for taking action to assure that medical contraindications are the only legal reasons to be exempted from New York's vaccine mandate requirements. In particular, we thank Senator Hoylman and Assemblyman Dinowitz for their sustained advocacy. It is critically important to protect those cannot be vaccinated – either because they are allergic to certain ingredients, have an immune system deficiency resulting from cancer, HIV or other disease, or the women who are pregnant. The current measles outbreak clearly demonstrates that community herd immunity has broken down. We also thank Governor Cuomo for his comments of support for this bill and look forward to his quick signature."

Dr. Linda P. Fried, Dean of the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, said, “The only way to stop the outbreak of measles – a dangerous and sometimes fatal disease – is to make sure as many children as possible are vaccinated. The New York Senate’s passage of critical legislation to eliminate non-medical exemptions from childhood vaccination requirements is a vital step towards protecting all New Yorkers — including vulnerable children — from this grave public health emergency. I thank Senator Hoylman for his leadership on this issue.”

Nancy Goodman, Founder and Executive Director of Kids v Cancer, said, “Kids v Cancer and the entire pediatric cancer community thanks New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman and the New York State Senate who voted today to require children who attend school to be vaccinated unless they have medical exemptions. This is a victory for all of us. Children with cancer and pediatric cancer survivors who are immunocompromised cannot go to school or to other public places. They must stay home, isolated. For these children and young adults, a case of the measles is life threatening. They depend entirely on others being vaccinated so that herd immunity can be reached and they can be safe.”

Teela Wyman, Kids v Cancer Youth Board Member and a New York law student who is a pediatric cancer survivor, said “I wear a mask when I am outside to protect myself against measles and other infectious diseases. I begin law school this fall, and I’m honestly terrified of what I’m going to do if a classmate or my teacher comes to class sick. These aren’t things that I want but that’s the price of living. The measles is an extra complexity that might not seem frightening to you but it’s terrifying to us.”

Toby Pallone, Kids v Cancer Youth Board Member and a New York high school student who is a pediatric cancer survivor, said, “When a person goes to the doctor’s to get a vaccination, they aren’t just protecting themselves from being sick, They’re protecting their friends, their

neighbors, and their community. It is a life or death decision when a person decides to not vaccinate himself or his kids. We have a beautiful state of 19 million people, and all of us deserve the gift of life.”

Cub Barrett, Vice President of Communications and Public Affairs for Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), said, “As an organization founded in response to a public health epidemic, GMHC understands that, to protect the health and safety of all New Yorkers, we must take bold, swift, and evidence-based action to address public health issues. Repealing exemptions for children to be vaccinated is what we would call a bold, evidence-based action. As our State Senator, Brad Hoylman, says, parents who refuse to vaccinate their children put the health of every New Yorker at risk. We can’t let this continue. We applaud the New York State Senate for recognizing—and acting on—this critical issue.”

RELATED LEGISLATION

2019-S2994A

- Introduced

- ○ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- ○ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ○ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor

- Relates to exemptions from vaccinations due to religious beliefs; and repeals subdivision 9 of section 2164 of the public health law relating to exemption from vaccination due to religious beliefs

January 31, 2019

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by [Brad Hoylman-Sigal](#)

Do you support this bill?

2019-S5136B

- Introduced
- ○ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
- ○ On Floor Calendar Assembly

- On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly

- Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to the [New York state vaccination awareness campaign](#)

April 10, 2019

In Senate Committee [Health](#)

Sponsored by [David Carlucci](#)

Do you support this bill?

2019-S4475

- Introduced

- ◦ In Committee Assembly

- In Committee Senate

- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly

- On Floor Calendar Senate

- ○ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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Relates to the definition of person in parental relationship to a child

March 12, 2019

In Senate Committee [Health](#)

Sponsored by [Velmanette Montgomery](#)

Do you support this bill?