



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham and Senate Approve Sweeping Covid-19 Response Legislation Package

PETE HARCKHAM May 30, 2020

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*Albany, NY* – New York State Senator Pete Harckham and his colleagues in the Senate finished approving this week a sweeping package of legislation to help support New Yorkers during the current COVID-19 pandemic, and help the state be prepared for future emergencies. The bills advanced by the Senate focused on protecting New Yorkers' rights, helping them stay in their homes, providing economic relief for struggling workers and

businesses, strengthening the healthcare system and maintaining critical services.

“Public officials at all levels have to step up and lead during times of crisis,” said Harckham. “The bills my colleagues and I passed will help New Yorkers so hard hit in many ways by this pandemic. Our chief focus has been to help residents every way we could in terms of maintaining a decent quality of life and access to vital services during this crisis.”

“This has been an extraordinary stretch in the history of our nation, and people in every state have been put to the test in terms of adapting to economic and educational shut downs, sheltering in place and maintaining public safety,” Harckham added. “The pain is deep and has been across the board. Our work is not done yet, and I will continue to help move New York forward through the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Legislation sponsored by Harckham (S.8363) will bring the Commissioner of the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) on board as a member of the Disaster Preparedness Commission. During the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers indicated a likely spike in relapse and emerging Substance Use Disorders, and including OASAS in the disaster management planning will ensure addiction service providers are not overlooked and are able to provide the best care for their patients.

In terms of protecting the New Yorkers’ rights, Harckham and the Senate approved bills that will:

- \* extend the period of time to file civil claims under the Child Victims Act by one year (S. 7082);

- update New York’s anti-price gouging law to include medical supplies and services as well as goods and services used to promote public health (S.8189); and

- \* enable New Yorkers to apply for absentee ballots through an electronic application, thus

ensuring more New Yorkers are able to vote and participate in the democratic process despite the ongoing pandemic (S.8130D).

For struggling renters and homeowners, newly passed legislation in the Senate includes:

\*the “Emergency Rent Relief Act of 2020” (S.8419), which will establish an interim residential rent relief program for low-income tenants. The program will issue a subsidy for tenants who were rent burdened prior to the Covid-19 pandemic; or are paying more than 30 percent of their income toward rent, and are now experiencing an even greater rent burden due to a loss of income.

It will also:

\*prohibit evictions for renters suffering financial hardship, though they remain liable for rent owed (S.8192B);

offer 180 days of mortgage forbearance (S.8243C); and

\*permit municipalities to defer certain property taxes during the Covid-19 State of Emergency (S.8122B).

Utility companies are also prohibited from terminating or disconnecting services to any residential customer for the non-payment of an overdue charge, a moratorium that lasts 180 days passed the end of the State of Emergency (S.8113A);

\*ensure that school districts do not lose state aid for closing schools in the 2019-2020 school year in response to Covid-19 (S.7996B).

For businesses forced to lay off or furlough workers since the pandemic began, there is a bill that:

\*creates an emergency loan program (S.8181A).

\*New legislation will also establish a Covid-19 pension benefit for families of public

employees who die due to their workplace exposure to the disease (S.8427).

Exposed weaknesses in health care systems will be remedied with legislation that:

- \*creates community-based contact tracing (S.8362A);

- \*orders a study on the health impacts of Covid-19 on minorities in New York (S.8245A)'

- \*allows licensed pharmacists to administer a vaccine for Covid-19 no sooner than 90 days once a vaccine has been approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (S.8182A);

- \*ensures audio-only and video-only telehealth and telemedicine services will be eligible for reimbursement (S.8416);

- \*requires residential health care facilities to prepare and comply with an annual pandemic emergency plan (S.8289B) to help residential healthcare facilities, including nursing homes, ensure the safety of their staff and residents during pandemics like Covid-19.

A number of other bills passed by the Senate will maintain a quality of life for residents and provide them access to important services. There is legislation to:

- \*provide financial and budgetary flexibility to local governments (S.8417);

- \*allow businesses, nonprofits, and religious institutions to conduct board meetings and actions through electronic and/or audio-visual technologies (S.8412);

- \*give public libraries that received library construction grant aid during the 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 fiscal years, but were unable to complete the project due to COVID-19, an additional 12 months from the statutory project end date to complete their projects (S.8412);

- \*grant cemeteries the option to provide sales of cemetery lots and related services over the internet (S.8408).