



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rachel May

## Senator Rachel May and NYCLU Announce the “SIGH” Act to Protect Students from Highway Pollution

RACHEL MAY August 28, 2020

| ISSUE: **STUDENT HEALTH, SCHOOLS, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**



**Syracuse, NY** - Senator Rachel May (D-Onondaga, Madison, Oneida) is proud to partner with the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) to announce her bill ([S.8877](#)) Schools Impacted by Gross Highways, or “SIGH”, Act. This bill will prevent new schools from being constructed within 600 feet of major roadways, and ensure that certain schools are included in the Environmental Impact Statements for construction of a major roadway.

Black and Brown communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards, and these hazards are particularly damaging to youth and young adults. Traffic is one of the largest contributors to air pollution, and is most potent within the first 500 feet of a major roadway. Children who attend schools near roadways have increased risk of asthma, chronic respiratory issues, cardiovascular effects, and neurobehavioral dysfunction. These are long-lasting effects which contribute to the overall performance of school age children.

A 2019 Report commissioned by the NYCLU found 53.1% of Black and Latinx children live within 500 feet of a major roadway. Comparatively just 4% of white students live within 250 feet from major roadways. Decades of racial segregation, redlining, and the systemic placement of pollution-emitting infrastructure in Black and Brown communities have played a role in this disparity. The American Lung Association says that one of the major reasons that respiratory illnesses are so prevalent in communities of color is the proximity of those communities to producers of hazardous air pollutants, such as major roadways.

“Children have the right to go to school without exposure to pollution that has devastating long-term effects on their health and their ability to learn,” **said Donna Lieberman, Executive Director of NYCLU.** “This bill is just the beginning of unraveling New York’s legacy of environmental injustice and racism. In too many cities, highways were placed with the intention of breaking up Black and Brown communities and facilitating white flight. Today, these monuments to segregation continue to damage health, access to education, and economic opportunity in communities of color.”

“Black and Brown communities face monumental challenges because of environmental racism,” **said Senator Rachel May.** “By safeguarding all of our schools against exposure to high concentrations of air pollution, we are ensuring our children have access to a healthy learning environment regardless of their zip code. Years of racist and misguided planning have resulted in shameful outcomes that require thoughtful and intentional action to

reverse. This bill requires our state to be holistic in it's planning and to take action to dismantle environmental injustice wherever we find it."

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### 2019-S8877

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- 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 enacting the SIGH act to prohibit the construction of new schools near a major roadway and includes certain schools in environmental impact statements for the construction of a major roadway

August 05, 2020

In Senate Committee [Rules](#)

Sponsored by [Rachel May](#)

Do you support this bill?