



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara, GOP colleagues put spotlight on Lyme and tick-borne diseases: Call for Budget Funding, Work to Raise Awareness

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 4, 2021

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

~~Now is no time to ignore funding for critical public health responses. Thousands upon thousands of~~

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

Albany, N.Y., March 4— With New York Governor Andrew Cuomo proposing to commit no funding in the 2021-2022 state budget dedicated to combating the spread of Lyme and tick-borne diseases (TBDs) throughout the state, Senator Tom O'Mara this week joined other members of the Senate Republican Conference and a coalition of researchers and advocates to put a spotlight on the need to invest in research, education and prevention initiatives.

The group is calling on Cuomo and other state leaders to commit at least \$1.5 million in the final 2021-22 budget to badly needed Lyme-related initiatives.

O'Mara said, "Now is no time to ignore funding for critical public health responses. Thousands upon thousands of New Yorkers suffer from Lyme Disease annually, yet Governor Cuomo's proposed budget fails to offer a penny of funding to help combat the spread of this disease. That's unacceptable and this Legislature must act in the absence of executive leadership. Important actions over the past several years have

broadened the state's overall response to the spread of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done, particularly in the areas of reporting, testing and treatment, and education and awareness."

[see Senator O'Mara's comments at a virtual news conference on Tuesday [HERE](#).]

During a virtual conference on Tuesday, lawmakers pointed to the fact that after years of advocates fighting for acknowledgement, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently updated its reporting measures and now estimates that approximately 476,000 Americans are diagnosed and treated for Lyme disease each year, a significant increase from the previous estimate of approximately 300,000.

One of the Legislature's leading advocates in the fight against the disease, Hudson Valley Senator Sue Serino, said, "Funding for public health has never been more important, and that includes taking the necessary steps to protect New Yorkers against Lyme and tick-borne diseases. Despite the fact that New York has made significant progress in raising critical awareness for Lyme and TBDs, yet again the Governor has not included any funding to continue this critically important work in his Executive Budget Proposal, threatening to undo any progress that has been made. With New Yorkers hitting our parks and trails in droves and a need to prevent exposure to any illnesses that may have similar symptoms to COVID-19, now more than ever, we need to be doing all that we can to ensure that combating the spread of Lyme and TBDs remains a top priority."

Despite widespread bipartisan support for efforts aimed at tackling tick-borne diseases, over the past two years, funding has been substantially reduced. In 2018, O'Mara and the Senate GOP successfully secured an unprecedented \$1 million in the final state budget to help support research, education and prevention initiatives. In both 2019 and 2020, however, funding for these programs was reduced to only \$250,000. This year, the Governor's

Executive Budget proposal even goes as far as to eliminate the small \$69,400 allotment that is typically included “for services and expenses of research and prevention, and detection of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses.”