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Senator May's SIGH Act Prioritizing Health and Safety of School Children Signed into Law

Senator Rachel May's (48th District) bill, the SIGH Act ([S4550/A8998](#)), was recently signed by Governor Kathy Hochul. This act prohibits the construction of new schools within 500 feet of major roadways, with some exemptions. Senator May championed this critical health and safety initiative in collaboration with NYCLU.

Dr. King Elementary School in Syracuse, beside the busy I-81 Highway, inspired Senator May to write the SIGH Act. The constant sound of traffic fills the school property, and students spend their entire day in classrooms and playing outside, inhaling pollutants produced by the vehicles. This issue plays out across the state: the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) is another glaring example of schools near busy, dirty highways. With concern for school children's health, Senator May went to Albany to make a change and improve their well-being with the SIGH Act. Although the bill passed multiple times, it ultimately failed to become law in 2022 when it was vetoed. However, Senator May remained determined to improve the health and safety of New York's children, which led to the successful passage and signing of the SIGH Act this year.

The evidence is clear: Busy roadways generate alarming levels of air pollution that threaten the health of our children in the classroom. Exhaust from passing cars contains a sooty residue containing chemicals and particulates that enter students' lungs. Studies show that students attending school near major roads are at significantly greater risk for asthma and chronic respiratory issues, which can severely impact their well-being. Furthermore, research underscores the detrimental effects of traffic pollution on students' ability to learn.

The SIGH Act also confronts an alarming reality: learning near busy roadways

disproportionately affects Black and Brown children. A 2019 study by NYCLU showed that “53.1% of Black and Latino children live within 500 feet of a major roadway. Comparatively, just 4% of white students live within 250 feet from major roadways.” This reality has placed vulnerable students sometimes dozens of feet away from major roads.

“New York State is making a crucial commitment to our school children’s health and safety with the SIGH Act. My bill is designed to protect our children by ensuring that their classrooms are free from the harmful effects of air pollution, which can significantly impact their health and learning. Building schools away from highways provides students with a healthy and safe environment and sends a clear message that we care about their well-being. Thank you to Governor Hochul and my colleagues in the Senate Majority for ensuring a better environment for children to learn and grow,” said Senator Rachel May.

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