



Support for Lyme Disease Treatment

Language in House FY2017 Budget and HB 901 and SB 502, “An Act Relative to Lyme Disease Treatment Coverage” (Rep. David Paul Linsky, Sen. Anne M. Gobi, Sen. Jamie Eldridge)

ISSUE:

Lyme disease is a tick-borne, bacterial disease whose symptoms include rash, fever, headache, and fatigue. If left untreated or insufficiently treated, later symptoms include severe joint pain, profound fatigue, heart problems, and central nervous system disorders. The disease can become chronic and debilitating. The 2015 report on Climate Change by the Massachusetts Senate states that insect-borne illnesses including Lyme disease “will become more prevalent and cause more individuals to be hospitalized” in the near future.

Although the disease was first identified in Connecticut, Massachusetts has one of the highest incidents. In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, the state saw 3,830 confirmed cases and another 1,770 probable cases (Total 5600). The Center for Disease Control has stated that the actual number of Lyme disease cases may be 10 times more than the numbers currently reported.

Field personnel from engineering and land surveying companies, as well as public works departments, often encounter the grassy and brushy terrain most likely to harbor disease-carrying deer ticks. These people are at risk of contracting Lyme on a regular basis and many have already been afflicted with the disease. A 2013 survey conducted by MALSCE found that 43% of the respondents had been diagnosed and treated for Lyme disease. Most of these people missed work because of the disease.

Section 67 of Chapter 131 of the Acts of 2010 allowed and encouraged doctors to prescribe long-term antibiotic treatment for Lyme disease patients. Now, the current bills (HB 901 and SB 502) will improve the treatment of Lyme disease by requiring insurance companies to cover the cost of long-term antibiotic therapy.

KEY POINTS

- The current language in the House FY2017 budget as well as HB 901 and SB 502 will require health insurance companies in Massachusetts to cover the cost of long-term antibiotic therapy for chronic Lyme disease.
- Land surveyors, certain engineers working in the field, as well as public works professionals are among the jobs where the rate of Lyme disease is higher than the average worker. This has an impact on both individuals and firms due to days of work missed.

ACTIONS REQUESTED

- *Ask your State Senator to support the Lyme disease amendment in the Senate version of the FY2017 state budget. Ask the Senate to keep the same language that is in the House FY2017 budget (H.4201), which starts on line 1360, Section 80.*
- *Thank your State Representative for supporting the budget amendment in the FY2017 budget.*
- *Support HB 901 and SB 502, which will expand and reinforce the long-term treatment of Lyme disease and require insurance companies to provide the needed insurance coverage.*