

Support for Lyme Disease Treatment

HB 4480, A Resolve Relative To Lyme Disease And Associated Co-infections (Representative Jeffrey Sánchez for the Committee on Public Health)

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.

For a variety of reasons, the medical community and insurance companies in Massachusetts have been reluctant to diagnose and treat chronic Lyme disease. Doctors fear negative repercussions from medical associations and regulators. Insurance companies refuse to cover long-term antibiotic treatments. Controversy continues as to the best diagnosis and treatment of the disease with antibiotics proving the most successful.

Although the disease was first identified in Connecticut, Massachusetts is second only to New York in the number of cases reported in 2008 (4,582). This brings the total number of confirmed cases in Massachusetts to 21,818. The Center for Disease Control records show a 242% increase in the annually reported cases from 2000 to 2008.

Field personnel from engineering and land surveying companies often encounter the grassy and brushy terrain most likely to harbor the disease-carrying deer tick. These people are at risk of contracting Lyme on a regular basis and many have already been afflicted with the disease. Several bills have been consolidated into HB 4480 that was favorably reported out of Committee on Health Care to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing.

KEY POINTS

- HB 4480 provides physicians explicit authority to prescribe and administer long-term antibiotic therapy for chronic Lyme disease without fear of professional repercussions or disciplinary actions.

ACTIONS REQUESTED

Support HB 4480, reported favorably by Joint Committee on Health Care Financing