

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, NOVEMBER 17, 2013**

**WHAT:** Hearing on H.989, a patient protection bill, before the Joint Committee on Financial Services

**WHEN:** Wednesday, November 13, 2013, 1:00-4:00

**WHERE:** State House Room A-2

**CONTACT:** Massachusetts Lyme Legislative Task Force, [lymebill@gmail.com](mailto:lymebill@gmail.com)

### **Task Force Testifies in Favor of Lyme Bill**

The Massachusetts Lyme Legislative Task Force, a group of patient advocates from throughout the Commonwealth, testified on Wednesday, November 13 before the Joint Committee on Financial Services, with an overflow crowd in attendance. The hearing concerned the passage of H.989, a bill that would require insurance companies to cover antibiotic treatment for Lyme as prescribed by a physician. The bill, authored by Rep. Theodore C. Speliotis (D-Danvers) is co-sponsored by 36 state legislators in the House and Senate.

Currently, there are conflicting treatment guidelines in the medical literature: some limit antibiotic treatment to 28 days, while others treat according to patient response. Although legislation enacted in 2011 (General Law section 67, Chap. 112, Section 12DD) enabled physicians to treat Lyme disease for longer than a month without censure, insurance companies often refuse to cover the expense of such treatment, citing the more restrictive guidelines. As a result, many patients have been unable to afford the treatment prescribed for them.

“H.989 is a patient protection bill that closes the gap between the physician's recommended treatment plan and the patient's ability to pay for it,” said Dr. Sheila Statlender, a psychologist practicing in Newton and a member of the Task Force. “Having seen so many lives ruined by Lyme disease, I know how important it is to have Lyme patients get adequate treatment as soon as possible.” Dr. Statlender also served on Governor Patrick’s Lyme Disease Commission last year. The Commission’s report recommended this legislation.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health reported 5,050 total cases of Lyme disease in 2012. However, a recent CDC study reported that the actual cases are ten times higher, bringing cases in Massachusetts to over 50,000. Lyme disease is pervasive throughout the Commonwealth. The loss in productivity can be costly to families: a 2011 survey by LymeDisease.org noted that 44% of Lyme patients nationwide had to stop working during their illness, and 28% of those were debilitated for over a year. In the MA Lyme Commission Report, it notes that chronic illness accounts for 84% of healthcare

costs. Only 21% of this figure is due to the cost of treatment, while 79% is due to lost economic output or productivity loss.

Additional members of the Massachusetts Lyme Legislative Task Force include Helen Brown of Whitman, Donna Castle of Groton, Janice Dey of Westport, Susan Fairbank-Pitzer of Danvers, Sharon Hawkes of Lenox, Jayme Kulesz of Groton, Patricia McCleary of Sturbridge, and Michelle Treseler of Newton.

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The Task Force would like to acknowledge the contribution of LymeDisease.org Executive Director Lorraine Johnson, JD, MBA in analyzing the financial cost of illness of Lyme disease, and would also like to thank the following for providing written testimonies for the hearing: Pat Smith, President, Lyme Disease Association; Brian Fallon, MD, PhD, Director of the Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases Research Center of Columbia University Medical Center; Leo Shea, PhD, immediate past president of the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society; and Steven Phillips, MD, past president of the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society.