



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, AUGUST 2, 2016**

On July 31 at 11:57 p.m., the Massachusetts Senate confirmed the passage of a bill (H.4491) requiring that insurance companies cover antibiotic treatment for Lyme disease. The Senate overrode Governor Baker's veto by a vote of 37-1, on the heels of the House voting to override by 153-3 on July 30. The House also quickly rejected an attempt by the Governor to introduce a new bill on Lyme treatment that was deemed not to be an improvement over the status quo.

The bill, which goes into effect immediately, will require that insurance companies cover antibiotic treatment for Lyme disease for any length of time, when prescribed by a licensed physician. Previously, some insurance plans had set arbitrary cutoff times for coverage, citing expired treatment guidelines.

Representative David Linsky (D-Natick), citing his son's own battle with the disease, championed the cause by convening a special commission, releasing its report in 2013. He then shepherded this bill through the legislature over the course of two years, with significant support from Representative Ted Speliotis (D-Danvers). Senate bill sponsor Anne Gobi (D-Spencer) and Jamie Eldridge of (D-Acton) led support in the Senate, with over 140 legislators co-signing onto the bill when it was first submitted this session.

The bill has an emergency preamble and goes into effect immediately. Having been vetted by the Center for Health Information and Analysis, the legislation is predicted to cost 0-11 cents in additional premiums per policy per year.

The legislation mandating insurance coverage is functionally identical to a Rhode Island insurance mandate that has been helping Lyme Disease victims since 2004. Attorney Joseph Larisa, former Chair of the Rhode Island Governor's Lyme Disease Commission that recommended their mandate and now a Massachusetts resident, hailed the new legislation. "This law has been a great success in Rhode Island. We expect a similar positive impact in Massachusetts," said Larisa.

Although the Massachusetts Infectious Diseases Society and small business lobbyists spoke out against it, there was strong support from the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society; the American Council of Engineering Companies of Massachusetts; the Massachusetts Association of Land Surveyors and Civil Engineers; the advocacy groups Lyme Disease Association, [Lymedisease.org](http://Lymedisease.org), the Massachusetts Lyme Legislative Task Force, the Massachusetts Lyme Coalition; and patients and their families across the Commonwealth.

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Additional sources:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/189/House/H4491>

<http://www.statehousenews.com/news/20161738>

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