

LAWMAKERS URGED TO BACK VACCINE BILL

BY ALLEGRA HOBBS
Special to amNewYork

Lawmakers on Tuesday were joined by immunocompromised kids and their parents in a last-ditch effort to urge the passage of a bill that would end religious exemptions for vaccinations in New York State.

State Sen. Brad Hoylman expressed optimism that the voices of those who cannot get vaccinations due to their weakened immune systems will help propel the measure to success, though time is running short in the current legislative session, which ends June 19.

In NY, a 'Parents' Bill of Rights'

"We have an obligation to protect our kids," said Hoylman, who noted New York City has a Parents' Bill of Rights that asserts the right to a free public school education for children in a safe environment.

The legislation, stalled in both the Senate and the Assembly health committees, would revise state public health law so that only children with medical issues preventing vaccinations would be exempt from the requirements within the public school system.

Statistics presented Tuesday show 843 measles cases in New York State alone, and 940 cases nationwide. More than 460 cases have been declared in New York City. The severity of the outbreak led Mayor Bill de Blasio last month to declare a health emergency.

Yet de Blasio has expressed apprehension about any measures that would take away the existing religious exemption, which allows parents to opt out of vaccinating their kids on religious grounds, arguing religious communities in New York are not the root of the problem, but rather anti-vaccination propaganda has fueled the current crisis.

But Hoylman said the religious exemption provides a loophole for anti-vaccination parents — those who do not have earnest religious objections are using the exemption to get around vaccination requirements.

A simple form

Under the current system, parents fill out a form and a school supervisor is tasked with evaluating the claim.

"The truth is most of these just slide through uncontested because who is in a position to question someone else's religious beliefs?" Hoylman said. "That is why we need to remove religion from the equation."

Hoylman, who was joined by Assemb. Jeffrey Dinowitz and State Sen. David Carlucci, noted California had already tightened vaccination exemptions after relatively few cases in the state.

At Tuesday's news conference, a handful of immunocompromised individuals, most of them children, spoke to the dangers posed to them by the spread of vaccine-preventable illnesses like measles.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Tuesday morning spoke in support of the bill on WNYC in a conversation with Brian Lehrer.

"You have a right to your religious beliefs; you don't have a right to infect my child," Cuomo said. "And that is the balance between your individual right and the community's rights. And I think the scale of justice tips in the favor of the community on this issue."



A cyclist at 33rd Street and Second Avenue, an area where pilot intersections have been marked with signs.

CRAG RUTTLE

New green light for city cyclists

Pilot program lets 'em go with the flow when pedestrians go

BY VINCENT BARONE
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Cycling can be made safer by allowing bicyclists to follow pedestrian signals — and not traffic lights — according to a new study.

New York City has installed what it calls "Leading Pedestrian Intervals" at thousands of its traffic intersections. The intervals give pedestrians a crossing "green light" several seconds before parallel traffic gets the go-ahead. The idea is that the extra time makes those walking more visible to turning drivers. The safety measure was also extended to cyclists at 50 intersections around Manhattan, Brook-

lyn and Queens as part of a pilot program, according to a new city study obtained by amNewYork.

Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration is now backing a City Council bill that would turn the pilot concept into law at the 3,494 intersections where the "Leading Pedestrian Intervals" have been installed in the Vision Zero safety initiative. (There are about 13,300 intersections with traffic lights in the city.)

"This study shows that we have another tool in the Vision Zero toolbox to make cycling in our city safer than ever," said Seth Stein, a mayoral spokesman, in a statement supporting the bill from Brooklyn Councilman Carlos Menchaca.

"We [look] forward to working with Council Member Menchaca to pass his legislation and make this a reality," Stein said.

Under the pilot program, launched in March last year, cyclists have been permitted to follow cross-

walk signals at 50 intersections around Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. The city found that total traffic injuries decreased when it compared data from intersections over seven months — from April to October 2018 — with the previous three-year average over the same time period. The report documented a roughly 27 percent drop in injuries, from about 75 injuries to 55.

About 80% already start early

While the sample size is small, it's already common practice for cyclists to roll through red lights alongside pedestrian crossings, the city and proponents of the bill argue. Before the pilot began, Department of Transportation crews monitored six intersections in Manhattan and Brooklyn and found that 240 of 301 cyclists at red lights rolled through during the pedestrian crossing phase — about 80 percent of riders.

"This confirmed what cyclists al-