

Vitale-Smith Legislation To Bring Awareness To Parkinson's Disease Approved By Senate

TRENTON – A bill sponsored by Senators Joseph F. Vitale and Bob Smith that would educate the public on the signs of Parkinson's disease was approved Monday by the Senate 37 – 0.

“Parkinson's disease affects one out of every 100 Americans over the age of 60, yet as many as half go undiagnosed when they start experiencing symptoms of the disease,” said Senator Vitale, D-Middlesex. “With a concerted effort to provide the public with information regarding diagnosis, treatment and resources, hopefully we can get New Jerseyans the help they need to manage the symptoms of this difficult, debilitating disease.”

“Too many New Jersey residents suffering from early symptoms of Parkinson's disease are completely unaware they have the disease and therefore are not receiving treatment,” said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset. “By training our police, fire and EMTs, as well as social service professionals, on how to identify the symptoms of Parkinson's, we can help connect them with medical professionals and treatment options that could make a real difference in their quality of life.”

The bill, S-1173, would create a Parkinson's disease public awareness and education program tasked with developing educational materials regarding the cause and nature, diagnostic and treatment services in the community and lifestyle issues of the disease. The awareness and education program would also be tasked with creating an educational component for emergency medical providers, social service staff and public safety officers to assist in recognizing the symptoms of Parkinson's disease and understanding how best to respond to individuals with symptoms of the disease. Additionally, they would be required to develop and maintain a list of current providers who specialize in diagnosing and treating Parkinson's disease.

Parkinson's disease is a debilitating, painful and incurable neurological disorder that disrupts the lives of those who suffer from it. Symptoms of the disease include rigidity, slowness of movement, poor balance and tremors which can impair a patient's ability to walk, speak, swallow and even breathe.

According to the American Parkinson's Disease Association (APDA), approximately 1.5 million Americans have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. An additional 50,000 Americans receive a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease each year. And according to numerous news articles, another 3-5 million potentially have the disease but have never been diagnosed – a number Senators Vitale and Smith hope to reduce with increased awareness of the disease and treatment options.