

Health Care Expansion Approved by Suffolk County

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New Law Protects Employees, Responsible Businesses and Taxpayers

Riverhead, NY — Yesterday a bipartisan majority of the county legislature in Long Island's Suffolk County voted 17-to-1 to pass the "Fair Share for Health Care Act" — a new local law to ensure that large employers in the grocery industry help pay their employees' health care costs. This new law puts Suffolk at the forefront of a new national movement. Lawmakers in New York City and Maryland have passed similar legislation with veto-proof majorities in recent months. Other states and cities including New Jersey and San Francisco are exploring related legislation.

"Passing the bill is a huge victory for taxpayers, workers and businesses that already take the high road," said Brian Schneck, chair of the Suffolk County Working Families Party. By one estimate, the county spends up to \$25 million each year on Medicaid services for employees and families of food retailers that do not provide health care.

The new law would require large grocery stores, including "big box"

retailers and drug stores that sell groceries, to contribute \$3.00 to health care costs for each hour that their employees work. Major grocery employers in the county currently contribute at approximately that rate.

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law designed the new law and has been advising policymakers on similar legislation in New York City and other communities. “The Fair Share for Health Care Act is a practical response to the costs that low-wage, no-benefits jobs impose on our communities,” said Paul Sonn, Deputy Director of the Poverty Program at the Brennan Center. “I think we'll see more cities and states following Suffolk’s lead.”

The new law was supported by major employers in the grocery industry, and enacted through a campaign led by the Long Island Federation of Labor, the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Working Families Party and Long Island Jobs with Justice.