

Testimony of Gregg Skall
HB 2008

Good morning. *My name is Gregg Skall and I serve as legal counsel to the National Capital Lyme Disease Association, a 501(c) non-profit headquartered in Northern Virginia.* For close to 23 years, we have advocated for public awareness of ticks and the diseases they carry. Ticks and tick-borne diseases are no longer just a Northeast US problem. They have spread throughout the United States, but *the northeastern* and mid-Atlantic states, and particularly Virginia have seen the greatest growth in these dreaded diseases. It is imperative that Virginians be educated on how to prevent the spread of these diseases and how to deal with them should they or a family member contract a disease.

Similarly, the medical profession has, for the most part, lacked the education and resources to effectively diagnose and treat victims of these diseases. There is still a great deal of misinformation in the medical community and the public-at-large about ticks and the diseases they carry. As we learned from former State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen Remley's 2011 letter to Virginia physicians: *"Wherever you practice in Virginia, you now have to assume that any patient exposed to ticks is at risk for Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases.* Sadly, that message has still not reached the ears of so many Virginia physicians. HB 2008 with its working group will authorize and bring a spotlight and resources to the Virginia medical community and the public at large informing them on how to effectively recognize, treat and stop the spread of ticks and the diseases they carry.

In 2010, our Executive Director *was honored to sit on the first Virginia tick-borne disease task force convened by Governor Bob McDonald and Secretary Hazel to study this problem and make recommendations.* Much has happened over the past 13 years with new research and new studies. It is now time for a new working committee to study and make their recommendations. We commend HB 2008 for requiring that organizations representing individuals living with or impacted by tick-borne diseases be included on the working group.

The National Capital Lyme Disease Association supports HB 2008 and respectfully recommends it's passage out of this committee.