



## NEWS FROM NEW YORK STATE SENATOR **JAMES SKOUFIS**

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**\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\***

### **Ahead of Easter Holiday, Skoufis to Introduce Bill that Empowers Parishioners During Church Mergers**

Senator James Skoufis (D-Orange County) will be introducing new legislation this week that would give Catholic church-goers a seat at the table during deliberations by the Archdiocese regarding closures and mergers of houses of worship. The move follows a recent announcement by the Archdiocese that the widely-beloved and well-attended St. Patrick's Church in Highland Mills will merge with a neighboring overcrowded parish.

Existing Religious Corporations Law describes the parameters by which some denominations may navigate potential mergers, including a provision specific to Methodists that requires a vote by parishioners before a church merger may occur. Skoufis' legislation will seek to add Catholics to this provision.

"While I fully subscribe to the separation of church and state, existing state law establishes some guardrails to protect the rights of the faithful to practice in their church of choice, without fear of losing their spiritual home," said **Senator Skoufis**. "I consider what's happening at St. Patrick's to be a prime example of why this provision is needed: the congregation is strong, the facilities are in excellent shape, and the community as a whole – Catholics and non-Catholics alike – rely on it as a gathering place. A loss of this magnitude should never be felt without local input."

The announcement by the Archdiocese on March 22 left many parishioners sorrowful and shaken. In recent months, a fundraising campaign led by church trustees, who were unaware of a looming merger, led to numerous upgrades of indoor and outdoor amenities. Countless children and families rely on the programming offered at St. Patrick's, including specialized programs for children with disabilities and a popular youth basketball league. The continuation of these programs may now be in question.

Senator Skoufis, who grew up attending St. Patrick's, [recently sent a joint letter](#) with local leaders to Cardinal Dolan urging the Archdiocese to reverse course. The Archdiocese has since announced continuation of some regular services at St. Patrick's this summer, but plans for a full merger remain.

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