

## **2019 NJPA Legislator of the Year - Senator Joseph F. Vitale**

Senator Joseph F. Vitale, a Democrat from Middlesex County, was sworn in to the New Jersey State Senate in 1998 to represent the 19th Legislative District. Senator Vitale is the Chairman of the Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee and Vice Chairman of the Labor Committee.

His legislative efforts over the years have spring boarded Senator Vitale into being one of the most respected voices on health care in the state of New Jersey. Early in his career, Senator Vitale recognized that one of the biggest challenges facing New Jersey families is access to affordable, quality health care. In response, he created NJ FamilyCare, which provides critical health care coverage to low-income families and their children.

He has worked to support the expansion of innovative care models like Accountable Care Organizations (ACO) and Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). His work to make health care accessible and affordable continues as he advocates for passage of a telemedicine law that will incentivize the adoption of such technology and improve patient access to specialty care. He scored a long-sought legislative victory when his bill was signed into law providing adoptees greater access to information regarding their personal history, including family medical information, legislation that was in the works for more than three decades.

Senator Vitale led New Jersey's effort to address the opiate epidemic by providing the Governor a blueprint and sponsoring necessary enabling legislation to implement a multifaceted approach focusing on education, prevention, treatment and recovery. His law giving first responders and the public access to the heroin overdose antidote has already saved countless lives.

Senator Vitale believes that health care and scientific research are crucial to the economic future of New Jersey. This philosophy guided him as he pursued a massive overhaul of the state's universities and medical schools, positioning them to make New Jersey a national leader in health care and research.

Senator Vitale has been instrumental in passing laws that have improved safety at health care facilities, empowered victims of childhood sex abuse, protected victims of domestic violence, prevented nurses from forced overtime and addressed the medical malpractice liability insurance crisis. He sponsored the laws that forbid discrimination based on gender identity and created the crime of bias intimidation. Senator Vitale is a leading advocate for homeless youth. In 2012, he traveled to Guatemala and Honduras to volunteer at Covenant House's safe houses and shelters in those countries. Each November he joins business leaders and top corporate executives to sleep out on the streets to raise awareness and money for the vital services Covenant House provides to homeless, abandoned, abused, trafficked and

exploited children. In 2014, he helped establish the first legislative sleep-out in New Jersey to benefit Covenant House's local efforts.

He is an advocate for the improvement of the education system, the protection of our environment, and the betterment of services provided to our children through the Division of Child Protection and Permanency as well as other state agencies serving vulnerable populations. Senator Vitale organizes annual events to support our troops and veterans, Habitat for Humanity, children entering foster care and families in need.

Senator Vitale has been honored by various organizations including the Women's Political Caucus of New Jersey "Good Guy" Award for his advocacy on behalf of women's rights as well as his support of women in the political arena. Notably, he is the recipient of the prestigious Ann Klein Advocate, Richard J. Hughes Career Public Service and Covenant House Lizzy awards.

Senator Vitale is President of Vitale Sign Corporation, a small business in Rahway. He resides in Woodbridge with his wife, Robin.

#### **Sample Legislation in 2019:**

**S-964** - Establishes Behavioral Health Services Task Force.

**S-1029** - Makes it a crime of the third degree to practice psychology without a license and prohibits certain unlicensed employees of certain entities from using title of psychologist.

**S-1032** - Concerns expansion of services provided by DOH mental health screening services.

**S-2530** - Requires certain licensed health care professionals and health care facilities to screen adolescents and young adults for symptoms of depression.