

Suffolk stalls drones' rise

Camera-bearing aircraft will need permits over county property

BY RICK BRAND

rick.brand@newsday.com

The Suffolk County Legislature voted yesterday to put the first limits on camera-bearing drones, requiring permits to fly them over county buildings and parks and barring all such flights above county beaches in summer.

The local law, sponsored by Legis. Tom Muratore (R-Ronkonkoma) and Legis. William Spencer (D-Centerport), was approved 15-2, with Legis. Jay Schneiderman (I-Montauk) abstaining.

However, some critics said the law may be unconstitutional and questioned how it will be enforced.

The measure bars flights of any unmanned aerial vehicle equipped with a camera above any county facility without authorization of the public works

commissioner, and bans flights over county parks without a permit issued by the county parks department.

The measure also bans any flights over county beaches from May 15 to Sept. 15 each year in an effort to protect beachgoers' privacy.

"It's time to have something in place with the technology progressing so rapidly," said Spencer, who received a drone as a Father's Day gift and is an avid enthusiast. "I love flying these things, and it's a very good first step in creating rules of the road."

Muratore said the measure protects constitutional rights and allows the news media to use drones in newsgathering. He said journalists "know how to use the equipment so they won't cause problems" in emergency situations, while hobbyists "who don't know how to fly

could cause problems."

The measure also exempts vendors with contracts to provide aerial photo services to the county.

Legis. Sarah Anker (D-Mt. Sinai) declined to support the measure without more details, saying such restrictions would "limit people's ability to enjoy our parks."

Legis. Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue), who also voted no, said the beach ban in particular is a reach given that people with cameras are free to take photos at the beach or in county parks.

"No one in a public place has an expectation to a right of privacy," Calarco said.

Justin Meyers, spokesman for County Executive Steve Bellone, said Bellone has taken no position on the bill and looks forward to public input at the executive's public hearing. Bellone has 30 days to sign or veto



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In summer, drones with cameras will be barred from beaches.

the bill.

Nassau County officials said there are no county laws that specifically address the use of drones.

Also yesterday, the legislature voted 14-3 to allow the non-profit Hudson River Health Inc. to take over operation of the county's Riverhead health center, the only Suffolk clinic staffed by county employees.

Officials said the takeover by Hudson River will reduce county costs because the nonprofit, as a federally qualified health center operator, receives higher rates of federal aid than the county. Also, the federal government covers the cost of malpractice cases.

The health center, located in

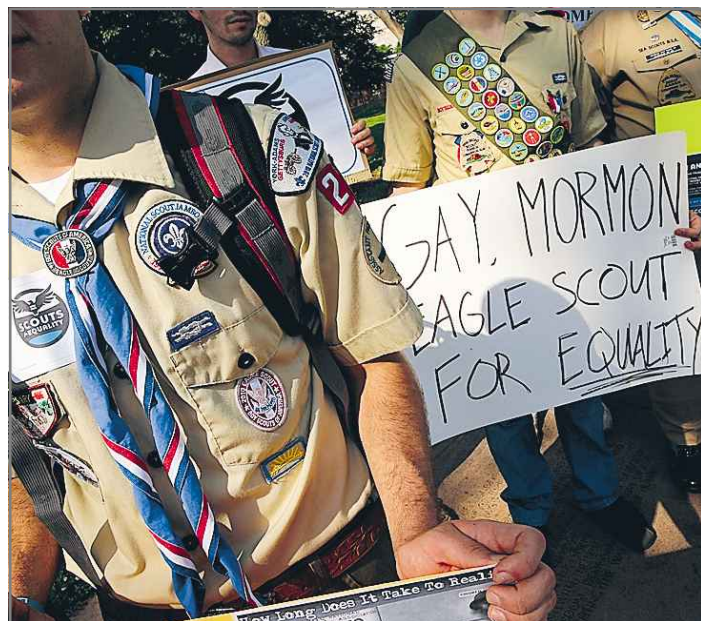
the Riverhead county center, is the last of Suffolk's eight clinics to be transferred to Hudson River Health. Most of the other clinics had been run by local hospitals under contracts with the county, with a handful of county employees providing specialized services.

Legis. Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) sought unsuccessfully to delay approval until health officials tell the 44 county employees at the clinic where they will be moved. Health officials say workers will get 30 days notice of new assignments before Hudson River Health takes over Nov. 2.

The county's union contract bars layoffs.

With Paul LaRocco

LI's Scouting councils OK gay troop leaders



BY JIMIN KIM

jimin.kim@newsday.com

Boy Scout councils in Nassau and Suffolk counties representing more than 20,000 youths will allow gay troop leaders for the first time, officials said yesterday.

The moves follow Monday's decision by the Boy Scouts of America to allow troops to pick openly gay volunteer leaders and ban discrimination in the hiring of employees. The decision allowed individual councils, most of which are faith-based, to choose leaders who reflect their own values.

Steven Grosskopf, president of the Theodore Roosevelt Council representing Nassau Scouts, said the group is focused on building character and leadership regardless of sexual preference.

Grosskopf said accepting gay

leaders will ultimately benefit both Scouts and religious organizations. "We don't want to focus on what separates us," he said, but rather "what brings us together as one."

Jay Garee, executive director of the Nassau council, said he expects the group to maintain its close relationship with religious sponsors. The council, which has nearly 10,000 Scouts and about 3,800 leaders, is chartered by the national organization and not run by a religious group.

Ryan DiBernardo, who heads the Suffolk County Council, also chartered by the BSA, said its troops will also allow gay leaders.

DiBernardo said he won't let the controversy surrounding the national decision impede the council's goals.

"Suffolk County Council will focus on helping . . . and creat-

ing dynamic experiences for our nearly 13,000 youth," he said. The council has about 5,000 leaders.

Temple B'nai Torah in Wantagh has sponsored the Nassau council and hosted Scout-related events for nearly 15 years. Temple administrator Sue-Ellen Pennington said she welcomes the decision.

"I think it's a wonderful move forward," she said.

Pastor Eric Olsen of Plainview's Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, said he, too, supports acceptance of gay Scout leaders. The church regularly hosts Scout meetings and has supported the council for nearly 50 years, he said.

"I am delighted that this ban was lifted so people that are gay may be able to serve in this capacity and share their leadership skills and gifts in this way," Olsen said.