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Poughkeepsie Journal Opinion

EDITORIALS

Insurance bill wrongly held back

A bill in the state Legislature could finally let people sue their insurance companies when claims are not settled in good faith. But Senate Majority Leader Bruno won't let his colleagues have a chance to vote on it.

The Fair Claims Settlement Practice Act has been passed by the Assembly several years in a row, and a majority of the Senate supports it.

The bill would require auto and home insurers to pay legal fees and punitive damages when they are successfully sued over nonpayment of a claim.

This would be an improvement over how things are now - all a policyholder can win in court now is the amount of the original claim. That means unscrupulous insurance companies can get away with unfair claims settlement practices, causing emotional and financial anguish for their customers.

Bill has important backing

The bill has backing from every corner of the legislature. It's sponsored by Republican Assemblyman Daniel Feldman and Democratic Sen. John DeFrancisco. It has the important support of influential Sen. Guy Velella, who chairs the Senate insurance committee and is considered an expert in the field.

But Bruno says the bill might result in higher insurance premiums for consumers, and perhaps it will. Yet giving policyholders this important right is worth that risk.

One can't help but wonder if critics are right if Bruno opposes the measure because the insurance industry has tossed more than \$70,000 into his campaign war chest.

Whatever the reason, Bruno is wrong to bottle tip this good legislation. He should do the right thing for the people of New York and let this bill finally pass the Legislature.