



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian X. Foley

Sen. Foley Introduces Legislation to Combat Growing Drug Addiction Crisis on Long Island

BRIAN X. FOLEY January 6, 2010

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Denise's Law will help parents keep minors in detox treatment, requires healthcare coverage for detox treatment

Senator Brian X. Foley (D – Blue Point) was joined by students and advocates at Sachem High School East as he unveiled new legislation (S. 6361) that will combat the growing drug addiction epidemic on Long Island and across the state. Named after Denise Gerardi, a former Sachem High School student who passed away in 2008 following an accidental overdose, Denise's Law will help parents get detoxification treatment for teens.

Denise's Law features two important provisions that will help individuals and families in the fight against drug addiction.

The bill (S. 6361) will allow parents or guardians to petition a court to require an examination, and if needed, detoxification, for minors who are suffering from addiction. Under the status-quo it is not uncommon for parents to check teens into rehab, only to have the teen check themselves out, before detoxification is finished. Because detoxification is a central, and often the first, part of recovery, it is crucial that parents have the ability to keep minors in detox and start the treatment process.

The second component of the legislation requires that drug addiction diagnosis and detoxification and other mental, nervous, or emotional ailments be covered by health

insurance companies. This provision is crucial in making treatment available to as many individuals and families as possible, particularly during these tough economic times.

“Drug addiction is destroying countless families and communities across Long Island and all around our state,” said Senator Brian X. Foley, the bill’s main sponsor. “I have worked with parents, educators, and advocates to craft this legislation which will take on the drug addiction epidemic and help put individuals dealing with drug addiction on a path towards recovery. My office worked with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the AWARE committee - an outreach committee comprised of students, parents, educators, and community leaders from the Sachem School District and the surrounding communities – who brought forth important ideas and a determination to make this legislation a reality. We are grateful for their advocacy, without which this bill would not be possible.”

Since the passing of her daughter to drug overdose, Carrie Gerardi has worked to raise awareness about drug addiction among parents and teens. “My daughter tragically passed away due to an accidental drug overdose,” said Carrie Gerardi, mother of former Sachem High School student Denise Gerardi. “I can think of no better tribute to my daughter than to have this legislation, which will help parents get treatment to minors, named after Denise. I hope Denise’s Law will be enacted as quickly as possible so those needing immediate treatment for drug addiction are able to be helped.”

Advocates for drug treatment joined Gerardi in supporting Denise’s Law and calling for its swift passage.

Dr. Jeffery Reynolds, Executive Director of the Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (LICADD), applauded the legislation as a major step towards helping those with alcohol and drug dependency. “With opiate use among teens on the rise, parents need new tools to protect their kids and help them get the treatment they need,” said Reynolds. “Every day at LICADD, we talk to parents who are desperately searching for answers and pleading for solutions in a race for time as their kids’ heroin use spirals out of control. Too many families are losing that race and are left standing by the side of a casket. There are enough

barriers to treatment, without families having to do battle with insurance companies who routinely refuse or limit coverage for substance abuse disorders. Attempting to detox yourself is a dangerous proposition, yet without adequate insurance coverage, many young people are doing just that. We thank Senator Foley for introducing this legislation and giving us the tools necessary to do battle with Long Island's heroin crisis."

Response of Suffolk County, a crisis hotline which helps Suffolk County residents address suicide and other drug and mental illness related issues expressed support for the legislation. "This important legislation will help remove barriers to receiving treatment that many families are desperately seeking for their children," said Maryl Cassidy, Executive Director of Response of Suffolk County.

"As educators, we see first-hand the devastating impact of drug addiction, particularly among teens," said Jim Nolan, Superintendent of the Sachem School District. "Denise's Law will make it easier for minors with drug dependency to get the treatment they need. I am pleased to support this legislation and hope it becomes law as soon as possible so we can remove the barriers that stand in the way of treatment and uplift our schools and communities."

Gary D. Bixhorn, Legislative Chair, Suffolk County School Superintendents Association expressed support for Denise's Law. "The heroin epidemic on Long Island is an enormous problem that is a major concern of superintendents across our region," said Bixhorn. "A comprehensive response to this problem by government officials, educators, law enforcement, the medical community, and all other Long Islanders is essential if we are going to stop this epidemic. Our Association applauds Senator Foley for taking up the fight with the introduction of Denise's Law.

"While no one expects one law to solve all problems related to addiction, Denise's Law is a major step towards providing treatment for teens with drug and alcohol dependency," said Foley.