



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Craig M. Johnson

Senator Johnson's Bill to Help Combat Long Island's Heroin Epidemic Passes Senate

CRAIG M. JOHNSON July 1, 2010

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The State Senate passed important legislation by Senator Craig M. Johnson, (D-Nassau), that will help combat the heroin epidemic on Long Island and hold drug dealers accountable for the deaths and destruction they cause.

The measure, (S.6418), which was drafted in consultation with District Attorney Kathleen Rice and the New York State Association of PBAs, would toughen existing laws to make it so a person who sells a controlled substance that causes a death would be charged with manslaughter. This legislation is a direct response to the rise of heroin use and heroin-related deaths on Long Island – particularly among teens and young adults, Senator Johnson said.

“A gravely serious heroin crisis is gripping Long Island's youth and those who sell death to our children must be held accountable,” Senator Johnson said. “This legislation will give prosecutors one more tool to protect our communities and safeguard our future. I thank District Attorney Rice and PBA members for their help in crafting this bill.”

Under current law, a dealer cannot be charged in relation to a user's death unless the dealer is physically involved in the injection of a drug. This legislation would amend the statute for Manslaughter in the Second Degree to include anyone age 18 and older, and with a prior drug conviction, who knowingly sells a controlled substance to another person and the consumption of that substance contributes to their, or someone else's, death.

“The news of the bill's approval in the Senate puts all heroin dealers on notice,” District Attorney Rice said. “You will be held accountable for the deaths and destruction that you cause. This bill will give prosecutors like me the tools to go after these dealers and hold them responsible at the highest level. I strongly urge the Assembly to approve the bill when it comes before them.”

Arrests on heroin-related charges rose 91% between 2005 and 2008 in Nassau County, while Suffolk County saw a 126% increase during that same time period.

“Heroin is increasingly cheaper and stronger, and its victims – especially on Long Island – are getting younger and younger,” said Tom Willdigg, President of the New York State Association of P.B.As. “I thank Senator Johnson for his leadership and for working with us to give law enforcement another tool to combat this epidemic.”

The bill, which overwhelmingly passed the Senate, is now in the Assembly, where it is sponsored by Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg.