



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

The Suffolk Healthy Sober Home Act Announced

[LEE M. ZELDIN](#) April 4, 2013

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Senator Lee M. Zeldin (R-C-I, Shirley) today joined fellow elected officials and community leaders to announce the introduction of legislation to certify, assist, improve and monitor sober living homes operating in Suffolk County.

The bill is one of the core priorities of the Tri-Hamlet Renaissance Project, led by Senator Zeldin. Addressing the Sober Home issue through the creation of statewide legislation is the result of this collaborative bi-partisan, multi-governmental effort.

According to the legislation, the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), in conjunction with Suffolk County and the Suffolk County Group Home Oversight Board, will establish rules and regulations necessary for the certification and operation of all sober living homes located within Suffolk County.

The bill states that all sober living homes will be inspected prior to certification and during the pendency of their certification. They must operate in accordance with all federal, state, and local building codes. The operators must demonstrate good moral character and have experience working with individuals with substance abuse disorders. Operating certificates can be revoked and operators can be fined if a sober living home ceases to meet the standards established through this legislation or any other applicable state or local county law or regulation.

In addition, the legislation would establish a toll-free hotline to receive and respond to concerns or complaints regarding sober living homes within the county.

Any owner operating a sober living home without proper certification would be fined \$10,000.

The announcement was made at a press conference held at the location of a former sober living home at 502 William Floyd Parkway in Shirley.

“A sober living home is intended to provide affordable, drug and alcohol-free environments for people in out-patient treatment who are working to recover from their addictions,” said Senator Zeldin. “The mission of a sober living home is to promote recovery and help these individuals to eventually become self-supporting. In order to meet this mission, residents must be afforded a safe, sanitary, and secure environment. But there are far too many sober living home operators in Suffolk county who fail to provide the atmosphere necessary for residents to be successful. While there certainly are some well-run sober living homes that truly aim to assist those in recovery, many of these homes are often overcrowded, drug and alcohol infested, unsanitary, and incompetently managed. This legislation is designed to ensure that appropriate living standards are being maintained, and establish regulations pertaining to the operation of sober living homes. In addition, it sets the terms of enforcement of these standards and regulations. I thank all of my colleagues who diligently worked on this effort to produce this important proposal.”

Senator Kenneth P. LaValle (R,C,I-Port Jefferson), said, “In general, there has been a lack of proper oversight. Families invest in their homes and must be protected from outside influences that could endanger the very reason they located in the Tri-Hamlet community. This type of legislation, which I have supported in the past, will insure that operators are licensed and, most importantly, operate in a manner that provides a safe environment for

the clients of the facility and maintains the communities' character.”

Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele, Jr. (I, D, WF-Sag Harbor) stated, "Since my election to the New York State Assembly in 1995, I have always made quality of life issues a priority. While there are existing reputable, supervised and successful sober homes and treatment centers, we need to ensure that all of these facilities are managed properly. I am hopeful that this legislation will end the unscrupulous business practices by those who put the importance of making a dollar before the safety and welfare of clients and neighboring communities. We need to ensure that those in recovery are given the support and sober environment they need to succeed, while being sensitive to community concerns."

“It is no secret that what has been called sober living homes has too often been nothing of the sort. People struggling with addiction recovery have been victimized by unscrupulous sober home operators who do nothing to promote the standards necessary for recovery, and neighborhoods have been victimized when what is supposed to be a well-managed recovery home is little more than an overcrowded flop house. This legislation, which will establish standards that sober living home operators must meet, is long overdue,” said Assemblyman Edward Hennessey (D-Medford).

Assemblyman Philip Ramos (D, WFP-Central Islip) said, “The Suffolk Healthy Sober Home Act will benefit my community because of the new and improved regulated guidelines that will be created. It will also provide the adequate and proper safety tools needed for individuals to have a speedy recovery in a safe environment, allowing them to go back into our community as healthy citizens and self-supporting.”

“I support State Senator Lee Zeldin tightening up NYS Sober Home regulations,” said Suffolk County Executive, Steve Bellone. “For many years, unscrupulous operators have gotten away with operating Rooming Houses under the guise of Sober Homes and not providing sanitary housing to Suffolk County residents in recovery. These same deceitful operators exploit and prey on their recovering tenants using them for dollars and cents rather than transitioning them back to productive self-sufficient members of society. I support this legislation as it makes operators responsible for providing safe and sanitary shelter for recovering Suffolk County residents, and establishes a notification mechanism to receive and respond to concerns or complaints of Suffolk County neighborhood residents regarding sober homes within their communities.”

“I want to thank Senator Zeldin for listening and responding to the concerns of the residents in the 3rd Legislative District,” stated Legislator Kate Browning. “I have worked hard to address complaints from residents in our communities to the extent that County law allows, but real reform and enforcement is impossible without New York State action. I have called

on the State for years to step up and help communities burdened by unregulated sober homes, and to assist our vulnerable residents who are desperately trying to find legitimate homes to complete their recovery. Senator Zeldin has taken the lead, and I commend him for working hard to implement the first regulations in New York State, which will benefit our communities and constituents who are most vulnerable and in need of good recovery homes.”

Brookhaven Town Supervisor, Ed Romaine, said, “For years, unscrupulous landlords have masqueraded as ‘Sober Home’ operators in an effort to make money, instead of making a difference in the lives of those who are seeking help and rehabilitation. These unregulated homes have plagued these communities, diminishing the quality of life for their neighbors, and threatening the health and safety of those living there. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Zeldin and Assemblyman Thiele, and the efforts of Legislator Browning, these homes will finally be regulated by New York State and Suffolk County, and uncertified homes can be easily identified for enforcement action.”

“I applaud Senator Zeldin for working to address the problem of what are tantamount to fraudulent and phony sober homes that are nothing more than taxpayer funded money machines for their owners and operators,” commented Brookhaven Town Councilman/Deputy Supervisor Dan Panico. “Far too frequently well intentioned legislation and aid meant to rehabilitate those in society that need a helping hand is misappropriated by the shrewd and greedy whose goal is to enrich themselves at the expense of taxpayers, our communities and those who are legitimately seeking treatment and help to get their lives back together. People deserve to live in clean safe communities and the taxpayer subsidized lawlessness that frequently stems from these overcrowded, and frequently dilapidated homes, will come to an end once the State closes the current loophole that currently allows such homes to ignore some Town building and housing codes, namely maximum occupancy. I once again thank Senator Zeldin and hope that his colleagues in the State Legislature see the wisdom in this legislation to help their communities as well.”

“I want to commend Senator Zeldin for introducing the ‘The Suffolk Healthy Sober Home Act’ legislation. This is precisely the type legislation that is needed to set clear and enforceable standards that will protect the quality of life of our hard working taxpayers as well as provide the proper support for those struggling with addiction,” stated Councilwoman Connie Kepert.

Village of Mastic Beach Mayor Bill Biondi, said, “On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the 12,000 residents of the Village of Mastic Beach, I would like to express my gratitude to Senator Zeldin for taking the lead on this important issue. Quality of life - for all - is of the

utmost importance and we appreciate and support Senator Zeldin's efforts.”

A copy of the bill and memo are attached.