



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kathleen A. Marchione

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| ISSUE: **CRIME, HEALTH, DRUGS, HEALTH CARE**

STATE SENATE TASK FORCE ON **IN AND OPIOID ADDIC**

For Immediate Release: April 23, 2014

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Community forum drew strong attendance and featured an expert panel that represented law enforcement, addiction recovery and treatment specialists, educators, health care professionals and elected officials

Senator Kathleen A. Marchione (R,C-Halfmoon) today hosted and moderated a free community forum on overcoming heroin and opioid addiction. The forum, sponsored by the Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, Chaired by Senator Phil Boyle (R,C,I-Suffolk County), was held at Hudson Valley Community College's (HVCC) Bulmer Telecommunications Center (BTC) Auditorium in Troy.

Today's community forum at HVCC – the fourth of 14 bi-partisan hearings and community forums being held across the state by the Senate's Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction – drew very strong attendance and featured an in-depth panel discussion on the issue of heroin and opioid abuse. The expert panel included elected officials, law enforcement, addiction and recovery specialists, health care professionals and educators.

The forum at HVCC also provided opportunities for questions from audience members to panelists and for audience members to make statements about the issue of heroin and opioid abuse.

The following panelists took part in today's community forum at HVCC: Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin (R,C,I-Schaghticoke); Washington County District Attorney Tony Jordan; Lieutenant Daniel Jones, representing Saratoga County Sheriff Michael Zurlo; Columbia County Sheriff David Bartlett; Captain Derek Pyle, Rensselaer County Sheriff's Department; Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple; William P. Murphy, MD, Family Physician, Chatham Family Care Center; Lisa Wickens, Registered Nurse and parent; Dan Farley, Assistant Principal, Ichabod Crane High School; Theodore J. Adams, Jr., MS, IMH, CAP, Hudson Valley Community College; Katherine G. Alonge-Coons, LCSWR, Commissioner, Rensselaer County Mental Health; Peter Lacy, LCSWR, CASAC, Acting Director, Saratoga County Mental Health Center; Dan Almasi, Dual Recovery Coordinator for the Columbia County

Department of Human Services; Beth Schuster, BS, CASAC, Executive Director, Twin County Recovery Services, Inc.; Stephen Acquario, Executive Director for the New York State Association of Counties, and Keith Stack, representing John Copolla, Executive Director, Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers of New York State, Inc.

“Today’s forum was about finding solutions, together, as a community, to the very real challenge of heroin and opioid abuse which are on the rise, not just in New York, but across much of the northeast United States. I am truly proud we had such a terrific, expert panel and such strong interest by the community. Behind every heroin and opioid abuse statistic is a person, a soul, and they need our help. I am hopeful that today won’t be the last word but the start of an important conversation about how we can overcome the rise in heroin and opioid abuse and addiction to help save lives,” said New York State Senator Kathleen A. Marchione, host and moderator of today’s community forum and a member of the Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction.

“I would like to thank Senator Marchione for hosting the Capital District Heroin Task Force Forum today,” said Senator Phil Boyle. “The information that we have gleaned from this conversation will undoubtedly assist us as we craft legislation to assist our communities in combating our harrowing statewide heroin epidemic.”

“Addressing the explosive rise in heroin and opioid abuse requires strong, proactive law enforcement coupled with effective treatment programs and enhanced community education. In Columbia County, the men and women of our Department are working hard every day to ensure local families are protected and that we address the growing problem of heroin and opioid abuse that’s impacting all of New York State. Our approach in Columbia County has been to ensure public safety and do everything we can do to keep our streets, and communities, safe. I applaud Senator Marchione for recognizing the importance of this issue,” said Columbia County Sheriff David Bartlett.

“There is no question that heroin abuse and addiction are serious issues affecting not only Saratoga County, but every County across New York State. Our Department realized this early on and made community outreach a top priority, along with increased enforcement to ensure this dangerous drug doesn’t fall into the hands of children. This issue won’t be solved overnight – it will require a sustained

community-wide effort on behalf of law enforcement, parents, teachers, mentors, health care professionals and all New Yorkers who want to better protect children from heroin and opioid addiction. I commend Senator Marchione, and the Senate Task Force, for putting public safety before politics and placing such a strong emphasis on finding solutions to this growing challenge,” said Saratoga County Sheriff Michael Zurlo.

“Opioid and heroin addiction is on the rise, especially in rural and suburban communities. I was humbled and honored to participate in a forum on this important issue, and I thank Sen. Marchione for bringing experts in the field together with elected officials. This is no longer a ‘city’ problem. In order to maximize our efforts at prevention, we must better understand what causes this growing social problem,” said Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin (R,C,I-Melrose).

“We want to raise a generation of productive members of society, not individuals who will get mixed-up in the dark world of drug addiction and only contribute to a rise in crime. We need to be vigilant with our young people. As the parent of two college-bound high school students, and as a legislator concerned about our community, this issue is particularly important to me because I know that heroin and opioid addiction can derail an otherwise promising future,” said McLaughlin.

“I was thrilled to join Senator Marchione in her efforts to highlight this serious public health risk that our communities are facing and work to find real solutions,” said Washington County District Attorney Tony Jordan.

“Any other disease (addiction) that caused the human suffering, financial impact and community devastation would have our government, the CDC, and the public-at-large hollering from the rooftops for attention, information, finance and treatment...where are we as a community...as a State...and as a nation?” said Beth Schuster, BS, CASAC, Executive Director, Twin County Recovery Services, Inc.

“As a clinician, a mother and an advocate for those dealing with addiction I commend the Senate for putting the spotlight on Opiate and Heroin Addiction. Although this issue has garnered a great deal of recent media attention, addiction to opiates is anything but new. What is new, however, is the growing number of people, families and entire communities that are struggling to cope with the devastating effects of this disease. Every day in homes throughout the Capital Region and across the state, more and more people are hearing that a friend’s child, a co-worker’s niece, a neighbor’s grandchild is grappling with addiction, or sadly, has died from an accidental overdose. I believe that every hearing held will accomplish one important goal: it will illustrate for those parents, friends, co-workers and neighbors that they are not alone. I hope as more attention is given to this crisis we, the addiction specialists, public and government can begin to develop a comprehensive multi-faceted approach to address the many gaps in our current system,” said Lisa Wickens, Registered Nurse and parent.

“Drugs are in our communities, they are in our homes and yes, they are in our schools. This is not a truth people want to hear. We would rather be told that the problem has been dealt with and those bad people have been suspended and our good kids are protected. That is not what I see. In schools those 'bad people' are kids and they have a problem that we need to help them solve. Suspension and punishment might be part of the solution but they will not solve the problem for that child. We need to have additional tools to work with; it is difficult to build anything meaningful when the only tool in our toolbox for dealing with this societal issue is a hammer. Counseling needs to be part of the solution and most small schools do not have the resources to have a drug counselor. These resources are part of our community and we need to work more closely with our local law enforcement, our local judges, our local legislators, and the community resources, like twin counties and Catholic Charities, to come up with a more collaborative and more complete solution to this problem. I would like to thank Senator Marchione for helping to initiate this process,” said Dan Farley, Assistant Principal, Ichabod Crane High School

“Another large piece of the problem is the supply. For many kids the drug that initiates them into drug use is no longer marijuana, it is codeine. The supplier is not some greasy haired thug in a leather jacket on the street corner. The supplier is mom, or grandma, or Uncle Joe. The drugs are in medicine cabinets just sitting there because someone got prescribed a pain killer for an injury and didn't use all the pills but didn't throw away the leftovers because they figured it made sense to have them on hand if something ever happened again. These drugs can be found by kids, they can be used by kids or they can be sold to get more powerful drugs. We need to deal with this as part of our overall solution as well,” Farley said.

“The Senate Task Force is appropriately reaching out to families and addiction professionals to gauge the impact of the prescription opiate/heroin epidemic across NYS. Senator Marchione has worked diligently to assess the need for prevention, treatment, and recovery supports in her district and in the Capital District and the group she has assembled for the forum at HVCC will ably articulate that need,” said John J. Coppola, Executive Director of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers of New York State, Inc.