



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Press Release: Senate Democratic Conference Announces Action to Combat the Rising Heroin Crisis

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Legislation Would Increase Penalties for the Sale of Opioids; Provide Local Rehabilitation Services; Extend Insurance Coverage; Reduce Overdoses and Teen Heroin Abuse

Albany, NY - The Senate Democratic Conference today announced the introduction of six bills relating to the growing heroin crisis impacting communities throughout New York. These six pieces of legislation would increase penalties for selling opioids that result in death, equip first responders with overdose stopping drugs, require health insurance providers to cover rehabilitation and anti-addiction medications, create a teen heroin abuse PSA campaign and provide opioid rehabilitation services in communities. The Senate Democratic Conference also released a report detailing the heroin and opioid abuse crisis in

New York with information gathered from a forum held in December of last year.

“Within the last decade opioid use, particularly among young adults, has risen at an alarming and unacceptable rate,” Democratic Conference Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said. “We have a responsibility to combat this addictive and deadly substance and educate the public against its use. The time for hearings is over, which is why my colleagues and I have introduced legislation to enhance penalties for illegal opioid dealers, better equip our first responders and increase funds for prevention and addiction rehabilitation efforts. I urge the Senate Republican Coalition to join with the Senate Democratic Conference to address this very important issue and bring these bills to the floor.”

STIFFER PENALTIES

Legislation introduced by Senator Breslin will increase the penalty for selling an opioid to another person that results in his or her death to manslaughter in the first degree. This bill, S.7100, is named Laree’s Law, after Laree Farrell-Lincoln who passed away in March 2013 due to a heroin overdose. With the increasing number of adolescent users, deaths, and easy accessibility, it is vital that New York strengthen its laws against sellers and distributors who release this deadly substance into the general population.

Senator Neil Breslin (D-Delmar) said, “Heroin and opioid use poses a growing risk to public health in New York and we have a responsibility to combat this highly addictive and deadly substance. This legislation will provide greater punishments for drug dealers who peddle opioids and put their neighbors and fellow New Yorkers at risk. My colleagues and I in the Senate Democratic Conference remain committed to getting this legislation to the floor for a vote.”

EXTENDED INSURANCE COVERAGE

Currently, most opioid abuse treatment programs provided by insurance companies in New York State only provide up to 30 days of treatment coverage. The limited amount of covered treatment time is not enough to effectively combat the problem of opioid abuse and all too often leads to relapse. To address these concerns, Senate bill S.7103 has been introduced by Senator Terry Gipson and will require insurance companies to cover addiction treatment for 60 days, and allows for physicians to extend treatment to 90 days at their discretion.

Senator Terry Gipson (D-Dutchess, Putnam) said, “Providing adequate substance abuse treatment is vital to combating the serious problem of heroin and opioid abuse in our communities. Insurance companies have an obligation to cover the essential services opioid abusers require to succeed and avoid relapsing into addiction. I am proud to sponsor this legislation that will help families across New York by reforming and streamlining the process of treatment and rehabilitation funding.”

ANTI-OVERDOSE DRUG ACCESS

Providing New York State first responders with essential tools and medications will help save lives otherwise lost due to inadequate medications. The opioid antagonist drug naloxone can be used to counteract a potentially fatal overdose in progress. Senator Velmanette Montgomery has introduced Senate bill S.7102 which will require all first responders keep naloxone in their possession to combat overdoses and will provide \$500,000 in state funding to achieve this goal.

Senator Velmanette Montgomery (D-Brooklyn) said, “The training and equipment of first responders can make the difference between life and death in a health emergency. Ensuring that our first responders have the tools and skills they require to administer life saving treatments to patients in the throes of an opioid overdose, we can help save New Yorkers. This is a common sense, life-saving piece of legislation and I urge the Senate Majority to

bring it to the floor for a vote.”

COMMUNITY OPIOID REHABILITATION SERVICES

In order to meet the rising demand for heroin dependency and related mental health services at the community level Senate bill S.7104, sponsored by Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk, will establish the Community Opioid Rehabilitation Programmatic Services Act. This act will create an Opioid Dependency Services Fund under the joint custody of the State Comptroller and the Commissioner of Taxation and Finance and will receive funds through the annual savings of downsizing of correctional facilities.

Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk (D-Duanesburg) said, “The heroin epidemic, once limited to our nation's largest cities, now threatens young people in rural and suburban communities throughout Upstate New York. The legislation I have sponsored will provide additional resources to combat opioid addiction and keep our children safe. And securing these funds from savings generated by facility closures means no additional burdens will be placed on local taxpayers.”

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The drastic increase in teen heroin use has heightened the need for public heroin abuse education. Senator Kevin Parker has been introduced Senate Bill S.7101 that will provide \$200,000 for production of public service announcements and a social media campaign that will highlight the dangerous consequences that can result from trying heroin even once. A similar campaign was waged in Montana to combat methamphetamine abuse, and was followed by a 63% reduction in teen consumption.

Senator Kevin Parker (D-Brooklyn) said, “As America learned during the drug epidemic of the 1970’s, education is one of our strongest weapons against the threat posed to our youth by

illegal drugs and abuse of prescription drugs. Too many New Yorkers are unaware of how easily heroin and other opioids can destroy lives, which is why I sponsored this common sense legislation to reduce New York's rates of addiction and ensure our youth understand how dangerous drugs are.”

ANTI-ADDICTION MEDICATION INSURANCE COVERAGE

Opioid-addiction treatment medications block the euphoric effects of heroin and other opioids and when used properly, patients can reduce or stop altogether their use of these substances. To help New Yorkers who suffer from heroin or opioid addiction receive treatment without incurring crippling medical bills, Senator Tim Kennedy has sponsored Senate bill S.4189, which will require every insurance policy that provides coverage for prescriptions drugs to also cover opioid-addiction treatment medications.

Senator Tim Kennedy (D-Buffalo) said, “As our state combats this heroin and opioid abuse crisis, we must ensure that individuals with chemical dependency have access to the medications and treatment options they require to beat their addictions. Requiring insurance providers to cover life-saving treatments is a common sense approach to protecting New Yorkers and our communities. Together, this series of solutions will help prevent the tragedies and struggles that so many New York families have had to endure as result of this dangerous epidemic.”

The six bills introduced by members of the Senate Democratic Conference will help New York State better confront the growing heroin and opioid abuse crisis impacting communities across the state. Increasing punishments on drug peddlers, while placing greater emphasis on expanding treatment for addiction sufferers and dissuading teens from ever trying these harmful substances are all common sense approaches to combating and beating this drug abuse crisis.

Senator Martin Malavé Dilan (D-Bushwick) said, “Opioid abuse is a vicious and lasting cycle. Our best hope for breaking it is to address every facet of opioid use in our communities, from addiction to overdose and relapse to recovery. This comprehensive legislation will provide the necessary tools to help get opiates off the streets, treat addiction, and assist recovery.”

Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan) said, “The proliferation of readily available and cheap heroin, along with the lack of widespread access to rehabilitation services and lifesaving medical technology, has meant that heroin use is increasingly the cause of far too many premature and unnecessary deaths in New York. The comprehensive legislative solutions being put forward today by the Senate Democratic Conference are sound public health policies that will help combat the growing epidemic of heroin addiction across our state.

Senator Ted O’Brien (D-Rochester) said, “The heroin epidemic has taken too many lives, and it is our responsibility as lawmakers to do whatever we can to help curb this troubling trend. By increasing penalties on heroin dealers, we are sending a message that we will not tolerate those who prey on our communities by distributing this insidious drug.”

Senator Gustavo Rivera (D-Bronx) said, “The use of heroin in New York State is simply costing too many New Yorkers their lives. This legislative package provides a comprehensive approach to fighting against the increased incidence of heroin use in our State by providing the resources and funding needed to improve preventive and rehabilitative efforts as well as supporting law enforcement efforts to increase legal penalties.”