



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Pushes for Urgently-Needed Legislation to Combat Heroin and Opioid Epidemic

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY May 5, 2014

| ISSUE: **DRUGS**



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

*Last year, in Erie County, heroin overdose deaths up 45 percent; more than 100 overdose deaths from all types of opiates.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, called for action on several Senate bills that aim to combat the heroin and opioid abuse crisis that is impacting communities in Western New York and across New York State. If these reforms become law, New York State

would increase penalties for selling opioids resulting in death, equip first responders with overdose-reversing antidotes, 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.

Senator Kennedy says this public-health crisis continues to grow more dire, making legislative action extremely urgent. The Erie County Department of Health reports there were 29 heroin overdose deaths across the county in 2013, a 45 percent increase from the 20 heroin overdoses in 2012. In total, there were 106 overdose deaths resulting from all types of opiates, including heroin and prescription painkillers like hydrocodone and oxycodone, countywide in 2013. That's an increase of 32 deaths, compared to 2009 numbers, according to a recent Buffalo News report.

"Western New York is enduring an epidemic of overdoses resulting from the surging abuse of painkillers and heroin, and local families have been calling for action to help put a stop to this growing public health crisis. It's time Albany heeds their call and passes strong reforms to combat the crisis," said Senator Kennedy. "These bills will prove to be crucial steps forward in our collective fight against drug abuse and addiction, and will undoubtedly save lives."

The six pieces of legislation introduced by Senator Kennedy and members of the Senate Democratic Conference will:

- Increase penalties for selling opioids that result in death (S.7100);
- Equip first-responders with the overdose-reversing antidote Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan (S.7102);
- Require health insurance providers to extend their coverage of rehabilitation services (S.7103);

- Establish a heroin abuse PSA campaign to educate young people on dangers and deadly consequences of using these drugs (S.7101);
- Provide opioid rehabilitation services in communities (S.7104); and
- Require health insurance providers to cover opioid-addiction treatment medications (S.4189).

Senator Kennedy serves as the lead-sponsor of the legislation to expand insurance coverage for addiction treatment medications, and he is working to ramp up statewide support as a cosponsor of the entire package of bills.

“A critical component of combating this crisis is ensuring 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,” Kennedy said. “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.”

These bills, advanced by Senator Kennedy and the Senate Democratic Conference, will help New York State better confront the growing heroin and opioid abuse crisis that has claimed thousands of lives across our state and nation. The legislation was introduced in response to the tragic stories of overdose and life-altering struggles that have been shared with Senator Kennedy and his colleagues across the state. Following a public forum held by the Senate Democratic Conference last year, which brought together law enforcement, medical professionals and family members of opioid abusers, Senate Democrats drafted a report detailing the heroin crisis and the need to enact legislation to better protect New Yorkers and communities throughout the state.

In recent years, New York State has taken major steps forward in the fight to end prescription drug abuse and addiction. Senator Kennedy has been demanding action to help address the epidemic, and new legislation is effectively combating the crisis. The I-STOP legislation passed in 2012 has prevented doctor-shopping, reduced painkiller diversion and limited the misuse and abuse of controlled substances through tighter controls and monitoring systems. In 2011, the state enacted the 911 Good Samaritan Law which encourages individuals to call 911 if they witness a drug overdose. Those were critically important steps forward; Kennedy believes more must now be done to combat this heroin and opiate crisis.

To view the full Senate Democratic Conference report, please visit:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/221001135/NYSenDems-Heroin-Report>

###

*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*