



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara bringing Senate task force to Elmira to examine growing heroin crisis throughout region

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 7, 2014

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Elmira, N.Y., May 7—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats) announced today that he will bring the Senate Majority Coalition's Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction to Elmira College on Friday, May 16, 2014 for a legislative hearing on the growing heroin epidemic regionally and statewide.

The hearing, which will be open to the public, will be held at Elmira College's Hamilton Hall from 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

The **bipartisan Senate task force, on which O'Mara serves as a member**, was created earlier this year at a time when local police departments, including many across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, were pointing to the alarming rise in the availability and use of heroin.

"We can't ignore the alarming threat of heroin, **meth** and other illegal drugs spreading throughout our communities. The risks are too great for these epidemics to spiral out of control and overwhelm individual lives along with our local systems of health care, law enforcement, criminal justice and social services," said O'Mara. "I look forward to bringing the members of the task force to Elmira to hear directly from those on the front lines locally who can help us zero in on the heroin epidemic. We'll be working to determine the most effective combination of law enforcement, awareness and education, and treatment and prevention to try to stop the spread of heroin, better protect our communities and save lives, especially young lives."

According to figures from Cayuga Addiction Recovery Services, the numbers of 19-to-25 year olds in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes treated for drug abuse increased more than 35 percent from 2007 to 2012. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has estimated that approximately 23 percent of those who use heroin become dependent on the highly addictive drug.

The Senate task force has been holding public hearings since early April in every region of the state. A total of 14 hearings have been scheduled. At the May 16th hearing in Elmira, O'Mara and his colleagues will hear testimony from regional law enforcement officers, drug addiction counselors, treatment providers, social services and mental health professionals, and other experts about the range of complex challenges posed by heroin including addiction prevention and treatment options, drug-related crimes, and other community and public safety impacts.

O'Mara, who has been highlighting the proliferation of heroin and meth across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes over the past few years, said that the special panel is targeting the alarming rise in heroin use and addiction across New York and will develop legislative recommendations for combating, preventing and treating the drug's spread. They want to act on the legislation before the end of the current legislative session in late June.

A 2012 federal survey on drug use and health reported that the number of people who said they had used heroin in the past 12 months rose from 373,000 in 2007 to 669,000 people in 2012. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has estimated that approximately 23 percent of those who use heroin become dependent on the highly addictive drug.

The task force is chaired by Senator Phil Boyle (R,C,I-Suffolk County), who chairs the Senate Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.