NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Press Release - Senator Ritchie Hosts Heroin Task Force Forum

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STORIES OF LOSS, SOLUTIONS FOR FIGHTING BACK SHARED AT RITCHIE HEROIN ABUSE FORUM

More than a dozen individuals including reformed addicts, treatment experts and law enforcement officials from Central and Northern New York shared experiences and solutions for fighting back against heroin abuse at Senator Ritchie's forum on heroin and opioid addiction, held Friday in Watertown.

The forum was one of 13 being held across New York by a bipartisan task force—which Senator Ritchie serves on—created to solicit input on the rise in the use of heroin and opioids, and find solutions for treating and preventing addiction and its consequences.

"The problem of heroin use has no geographic, regional or economic boundaries. It's a problem both Upstate and downstate and affects people of all ages from all walks of life," said Senator Ritchie.

"Heroin is touching every single corner of our state, including Central and Northern New York. The testimony delivered today will be invaluable as we work to find solutions to fight back against abuse of this drug, which as we know—and heard today—destroys lives."

Heroin use, arrests and fatal overdoses are on the rise, as more young adults are turning to the drug, which is cheap and widely available in cities and rural communities across Upstate New York.

In addition to past users of heroin as well as others who have had loved ones struggle with addiction to the drug, the following individuals delivered testimony:

Adam Bullock RN, Director, Behavioral Health Services at Canton Potsdam Hospital

Cindy Intschert, Jefferson County District Attorney

Steve Jennings, Public Health Planner, Jefferson County Department of Public Health

Oswego County Sheriff Reuel Todd

Addiction specialist Dr. Charlie Moehs

Penny Morley, Prevention Director, Farnham Family Services

Jim Scordo, Executive Director, CREDO Community Center for the Treatment of Addictions

Anita Seefried-Brown, Program Director, Jefferson County Alcohol and Substance Abuse Council

Detective Sean O'Brien St. Lawrence County Sheriff's Department

Speakers at the forum identified three areas that need to be addressed to help solve the problem of heroin abuse. They included review of state laws to punish drug dealers, expanding treatment options and including issues related to insurance coverage for treatment as well as the need for more school-based prevention education.

The Watertown forum was one of two being held on the same day in the North Country. The other was hosted in Plattsburgh by Senator Betty Little. A Central New York forum was also held recently by Senator Joe Griffo.

Joining Senator Ritchie at Friday's forum were Assemblyman Will Barclay and Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush, both of whom Senator Ritchie has worked with on efforts to combat synthetic drugs in our region.

"Recent statistics regarding heroin use in our communities are concerning. Testimony from recovering addicts, treatment experts as well as law enforcement helps us devise policies that will hopefully help curb abuse and raise public awareness," said Assemblyman Will Barclay.

"Heroin is fast becoming a major problem in our region and across the state," said Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush. "I'm pleased to be able to have had the opportunity listen to those on the front lines who can help us to provide solutions to fighting this deadly drug."

For those who were unable to testify at the forum, Senator Ritchie is accepting written testimony until May 2nd, which can be submitted by clicking here.

A 2012 federal survey on drug use and health reported that the number of people who said they used heroin in the past 12 months rose from 373,000 people in 2007 to 669,000 people in 2012. The agency also reported that the number of people dependent on heroin rose, from 179,000 people in 2007 to 369,000 people in 2011.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in 2011, 4.2 million Americans aged 12 or older (or 1.6 percent) said they had used heroin at least once in their lives. The NIH estimates that approximately 23 percent of individuals who use heroin become dependent on this highly addictive drug.