



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Heroin and Opioid Abuse Create a Public Health Crisis

PATRICK GALLIVAN February 29, 2016

| ISSUE: **HEROIN AND OPIOID ADDICTION**



Our society is facing an epidemic that shows no sign of easing. The use of heroin, opioids, cannabinoids and other synthetic drugs is destroying lives in communities across Western New York, the state and our nation. These drugs come in different forms, including prescription pain medications, and can be found on our street, in our schools, and even in our prisons. Far too many families have been impacted by this public health crisis.

In my years in law enforcement, as a State Trooper and Sheriff of Erie County, I learned that no community and no demographic is immune from the scourge of drug abuse and

addiction. Recent statistics from the Erie County Health Department illustrate the depth of the problem. Since the beginning of 2014, more than 350 people have died from overdoses in Erie County, including 23 people over a recent 11 day period. Twelve of the 23 deaths occurred in Buffalo, while the others were in suburban and rural areas. The victims were between 20 and 61 years of age. In addition to the senseless and tragic loss of life, a new state report found the use of synthetic cannabinoids cost New York taxpayers nearly \$23 million last year.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime & Corrections, and as a member of the Senate's Joint Task Force on Heroin & Opioid Addiction, I have met with law enforcement officials, health and mental health experts, victim advocates and others working hard to combat this crisis. Over the past year, the Task Force has worked to secure additional funding for prevention, treatment and recovery services, and to expand access to naran, which can reverse the effects of heroin and save lives. We need to make sure people get the help they need and that families receive the support they deserve. But clearly, more must be done.

The Senate has recently approved a package of bills to help eradicate the sale of heroin and other synthetic drugs. The legislation expands the list of drugs considered controlled substances and increases the penalty for their sale and distribution. I urge the Assembly to approve these measures and send them to the governor. I am also proud to co-sponsor a bill, Laree's Law, which would make it possible to charge a dealer with homicide if the heroin or opioid they sell causes an overdose death. The legislation is named for an Albany area teenager who died of a heroin overdose three years ago.

We all have a role to play in fighting this battle. New Yorkers struggling with an addiction, or whose loved ones are struggling, can find help by calling the state's toll-free HOPEline at 1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7369). Treatment providers can also be found through the Office of

Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services at: <http://www.oasas.ny.gov/accesshelp/>. Visit [www.combatheroin.ny.gov](http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov) for more information on addressing heroin and prescription opioid abuse, including a Kitchen Table Tool Kit to help start the conversation about the warning signs of addiction and where to get help.