



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Combating the Heroin & Opioid Crisis

PATRICK GALLIVAN August 3, 2016

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Western New York and communities across the state are facing one of the most challenging public health crises in generations as we combat the rising scourge of heroin and prescription opioid abuse. Far too many individuals and families have felt the pain caused by these powerful drugs.

According to the Erie County Health Department, 256 deaths were linked to opioid-related overdoses last year, a staggering 102% increase from 2014. The typical overdose victim was a white male approximately 38 years old.

As a former State Trooper and Sheriff of Erie County, and as a member of the New York Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, I am committed to doing everything possible to address this issue. My Senate colleagues and I have worked hard to develop solutions to end this crisis and help those struggling with addiction. The battle must be fought through a multi-pronged approach of prevention, treatment, recovery and education services. A package of legislation to address this crisis head-on was agreed to by the Senate, the Assembly and the governor last month.

These new laws will establish New York as the leader in the battle against addiction by enhancing insurance coverage for individuals seeking treatment and recovery services and extending the length of time a person can receive these life-saving services. The New York State Department of Health will also create educational materials regarding the dangers of prescription drug misuse, the potential for addiction, available treatment resources and proper drug disposal techniques. These materials will be made available to pharmacies across the state for distribution to consumers.

The state will also expand its reporting of opioid overdoses and examine data regarding areas of the state experiencing high rates of overdoses. These vital statistics will be sent to counties each quarter and will provide a greater understanding of the areas struggling most with this crisis, which will help to better allocate funding for prevention, treatment and recovery services.

In addition to these crucial measures, my office held a substance abuse awareness forum earlier this year at Depew High School. Health experts and law enforcement officials were on hand to share important information about prescription drug and heroin addiction. We also heard heartbreaking stories from families and community members devastated by this epidemic.

The Legislature was also instrumental in securing \$189 million in funding in the 2016-17 state budget to strengthen prevention, treatment and recovery services, including the opening of new recovery and outreach centers and hundreds of new treatment beds statewide.

There are no easy answers or quick fixes to solving this crisis. The steps we have taken will help prevent future tragedies, but we must continue our fight by holding drug dealers accountable and providing help and compassion to the thousands of New Yorkers gripped by addiction. Together, we can put an end to this public health crisis. More information is available through the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services at 1-877-8-HOPENY or <https://www.oasas.ny.gov/accesshelp>