



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

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THOMAS F. O'MARA January 27, 2017

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Elmira, N.Y., January 27—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) will continue serving on the Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction in 2017 and keep working with his task force colleagues to develop and strengthen state policies, programs and services to

address the epidemic.

The Senate created its bipartisan task force in 2014 at a time when local police departments and addiction centers, including many across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, were pointing to the alarming rise in the availability and use of heroin. O'Mara has been a task force member since its inception and sponsored task force forums in Elmira in 2014 and in Penn Yan last year.

In 2017, O'Mara said that the group will continue holding public forums throughout the state to hear from regional law enforcement officers, first responders and district attorneys, drug addiction counselors and treatment providers, recovering addicts and family members, social services and health professionals, educators 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 health and safety impacts.

"The input our task force receives directly from the local front lines in fighting this heroin and opioid crisis is the foundation we're building on. This local input, which has been reflected in **actions we've taken over the past several years**, helps us target the necessary responses and will keep our strategies as up to date as possible," said O'Mara. "Heroin and opioid abuse is devastating lives in Penn Yan, Hornell, Ithaca, Elmira and many other communities throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide. Local input will remain the driving force behind the actions we take to strengthen the state-local partnership critical to putting in place the most effective strategy of law enforcement, awareness and education, and treatment and prevention."

The Senate task force will be chaired by two new co-chairs this year, including O'Mara's Southern Tier colleague, Senator Fred Akshar (R,C,I,Ref-Colesville). The other chair is newly elected Western New York Senator Chris Jacobs (R,C,I, Buffalo), a former Erie County clerk.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 2,754 New Yorkers died of a drug overdose in 2015 – a majority due to heroin and opioids – which was a 20 percent increase from the year before. O'Mara said the task remains focused on a four-pronged approach to the crisis:

- 1.) Prevention by increasing awareness to better educate the public of the inherent risks involved in using heroin and prescription opioids, and taking advantage of technological advances available to deter the abuse of prescription drugs and prevent addiction;
- 2.) Treatment through the recognition of the critical need for expanded and improved insurance coverage, and enhancing access to all forms of effective treatment - including inpatient, outpatient, and Medication Assisted Treatment - in order to help individuals return to stable and productive lives;
- 3.) Recovery by providing the proper supports, such as safe environments, stable employment, and opportunities to participate in diversion programs that avoid incarceration in order to facilitate successful recoveries from addiction; and
- 4.) Enforcement by implementing criminal justice reforms that give law enforcement the necessary tools to disrupt the supply of heroin and stop the diversion of opiate prescription medications within the state.

Read Senator O'Mara's recent column, "[**Stark reminders on the heroin crisis**](#)"