



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John E. Brooks

## Senator John Brooks Brings Community Together to Fight Long Island's Drug Epidemic

SENATOR JOHN E. BROOKS September 14, 2017

| ISSUE: **ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE, DRUG PREVENTION, WAR ON DRUGS, SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT AND RECOVERY, FAMILY HEALTH**



Today, Senator John E. Brooks was joined by organizations, agencies and individuals fighting the local opioid epidemic. Together, the coalition called for greater public awareness of drug use prevention, symptoms and resources to combat addiction.

Recent reports identify the Massapequa area as having the most opioid-related deaths in years 2015, 2016 and 2017 to date in Nassau County. Workers in the field of addiction point to

a pervasive attitude towards addiction of “not my family; not my friends; not me” that is hindering the path to wellness for many on Long Island.

**Senator Brooks said,** “This epidemic is destroying our communities and it’s time for us to reclaim our children, neighbors and loved ones; we must break free of the stigma that surrounds substance abuse. The opioid crisis is indiscriminately affecting Long Island families in all communities. Absolutely no one is immune. We are standing united today to say that we can no longer allow shame or stigma to take one more life.”

Several organizations who joined Senator Brooks today are a part of his Opioid Policy Working Group and meet regularly to discuss ways that they can collectively raise awareness on substance abuse and work towards prevention. Organizations include: Every Child Matters, LICADD, Yes Center, LIRA, NYC Board of Education-experienced advocates, Nassau County District Attorney’s Office, South Oaks Hospital/ Northwell Health System, National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Massapequa Takes Action (MTA), Merrick Community Coalition, SCPD Joint LI Heroin Task Force, LindyCares, Family and Children's Organization, Family In Support of Treatment (FIST)/Seafield, Nassau County Police Department, Drug Free LI, Kiwanis, Copiague Community Cares Coalition, Nassau PTA, BMHTF.

According to practitioners and educators, the first steps recommended for parents, guardians and other adults raising youngsters, in order to prevent drug use; detect it; and begin to recover are:

- Start talking with children at a very young age; it is NEVER too early - and learn to listen when they talk to you.
- Closely watch children’s social habits and friends.

- Don't think you are the only one facing these issues - don't be ashamed to ask for help; remember, this is a disease.

Those who are on the front lines of the battle stated top priorities:

- Educating families about warning signs and symptoms of drug addiction.
- Eliminating the stigma associated with addiction that discourages both parent and child from seeking help: Drug addiction is a disease.
- Availability of more treatment centers
- Establishing a 'recovery' high school(s)
- Insurance to cover longer stays in treatment in order for programs to be effective.
- Treatment on demand: when an individual finally agrees to seek help, the window of opportunity is very small. Numerous persons turned away at hospital emergency rooms make their next call to their drug dealer to avoid going into painful withdrawal.
- Broadcasting the message: Recovery is possible!

## Everyone Can Help

Addiction prevention begins long before the onset of substance use. Every individual must evaluate his own perceptions and norms about recreational alcohol and marijuana use. All substances can act as a pathway to addiction and lead to lifelong consequences. As the demands of our current culture results in higher stress levels for families, modeling healthy coping skills and being aware of our own struggles as parents can greatly affect our children. Becoming educated about family, peer and individual risk factors is a critical start to knowing how to build resiliency in each child and family.

While the community has lost so many young people to this epidemic, there are adults of all ages and walks of life battling addiction and emotional pain in our neighborhoods. We must continue to reduce the stigma of addiction so that parents in the shadows of their own addiction are comfortable seeking help for themselves and their families.

Everyone in the community can also play a vital role by joining groups such as the Massapequa Takes Action (MTA) Coalition to strengthen their efforts. Schools must continue to support partnerships that allow for integrated prevention programming for all students.

Coalition members are already working closely with school districts, police departments, state officials, counseling centers and other groups. There are support groups for families and friends who suffer as much as or even more than the addict, such as parents helplessly watching a child slowly killing him or herself, as well as bereavement groups specifically for those who have lost a loved one to addiction. Practitioners are emphatic that “addiction is a family disease” and it often destroys the family. To a person they vow to continue to fight for every individual affected by the disease of addiction.

#### **Comments from speakers and local leaders**

Nassau County District Attorney Madeline Singas said, “Everyone has a role to play in the fight to end the opioid epidemic and I commend Senator Brooks and all of our community partners for shining a spotlight on this crisis and promoting the resources that are available to those struggling with addiction. My office will continue our multi-front assault to reclaim our communities from the grip of opioid abuse with aggressive and collaborative enforcement efforts, innovative programs to end the treatment gap, education campaigns to prevent drug abuse, and legislative advocacy for stronger laws to take on heroin dealers. We are grateful to Senator Brooks for his strong support.”

Jamie Bogenschutz, Executive Director, YES Community Counseling Center said, "This is an issue that affects us all; no one is immune to the dire consequences that has an impact on every member of the community, either directly or indirectly. To make a difference, we must all be a part of the efforts to learn more, do more, and be more for one another!"

Jeffrey L. Reynolds, Ph.D., CEAP, SAP, President & CEO, Family and Children's Association said, "What's most important is ensuring that resources recently allocated as part of the state budget process translate into services related to evidence-based prevention, access to treatment on demand and support for people in recovery."

Janice Talento, Founder/President, Drug Free Long Island said, "The disease of addiction does not discriminate. We all need to work together to change how our communities view and treat those struggling."

Anthony Rizzuto LMSW, CASAC, Executive Director & Founder of Families In Support of Treatment (FIST) said, "We are seeing a record number of overdose deaths on Long Island. We need to work towards treatment on demand if we are going to make a difference."

Dr. Thomas J. Fasano, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, Massapequa Public Schools said, "Our mindset needs to change regarding the dangers of opioids and how easily a problem can start. The danger is not just facing our youth, but everyone in our community. We need to work together to raise awareness, educate, advocate for legislation and to provide resources to parents, physicians, and of course anyone in crisis. We ask for everyone's participation in our community efforts to address this serious issue, and we will continue to work collaboratively with the Massapequa Takes Action Coalition, as we have for years. We greatly appreciate the attention this matter is receiving by Senator Brooks providing this venue."

Jonathan Morgenstern, PhD, Director of Addiction Services at Northwell Health said, "The opioid epidemic in New York State is a multi-faceted issue and Northwell Health hopes that by partnering with law enforcement and other groups we can work together to find a solution. We have formed the Northwell Health Opioid Taskforce looking at the many ways that as healthcare practitioners we can have a positive effect on the opioid epidemic, from lowering the amount of prescription narcotics given to a patient when appropriate, to offering free Narcan training at facilities including South Oaks Hospital in nearby Amityville."