



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

## Senator Murphy Hosts Fact-Finding Meet on Sober Homes

TERRENCE MURPHY February 16, 2018

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Pleasantville, NY - When an 18-year-old in recovery inexplicably died while living at a sober home in Yorktown in December 2015, his demise revealed the ugly truth that sober homes have no accountability and lack standards for care. To help gather information for a framework that can be used for sober home reform, Senator Terrence Murphy hosted a public meeting on February 15th at Pace University with members of the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, health care experts and community advocates.

In addition to Senator Murphy, the other members of the Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction included Senator George Amedore, Jr. and Senator Fred Akshar, with Assemblyman Kevin Byrne joining them on the dais.

"This is a subject a lot of people do not want to talk about," said Senator Murphy. "The function of a sober home is to act as a safe setting for someone with the need to avoid drugs and alcohol. Too many of these homes are run haphazardly or irresponsibly with profit in mind, while actually taking care of someone in recovery is a distant second. There are currently no rules on how to run a sober home. We want to bring to light and share information that can ultimately lead to a set of standards for these facilities."



Senator Amedore said, "We want to take what we hear this evening and be able to put it into practice. This is why we have asked the community, drug and alcohol treatment providers, and the people on the front lines running these houses to come here this evening. We want grassroots information that is pertinent, so we can fix the system before another family has to suffer."

"In my previous career as an undercover narcotics investigator, I witnessed families being ripped apart by this heroin epidemic," said Senator Fred Akshar. "As a Co-Chair of the Joint Senate Task Force, I am proud of the work we have accomplished so far that focuses on prevention, treatment and recovery, education, and enforcement. There is no silver bullet, and we must continue to listen to families and communities across the state to identify needs so we can help direct the appropriate resources and craft comprehensive legislation to continue fighting this scourge. The heroin epidemic did not arrive at our doorstep overnight, and it will not be eliminated overnight either. It knows no social or economic class, no race or creed. We need to continue working together as a state to fight this problem. Lives and families across New York depend on it."

Assemblyman Kevin Byrne stated, "Thank you to Senator Terrence Murphy and all the members of the Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction for holding this public meeting and inviting me to participate. I would also like to thank the medical professionals, health care providers and families whose loved ones have suffered from this epidemic for providing their valuable input on the current state sober homes in our community. It is critical that we leave no stone left unturned in the fight against heroin and opioid addiction."

The meeting was divided into four panels discussing individual topics. County Executive

George Latimer, Putnam County Judge Hon. James Reitz, Fred Way (National Alliance for Recovery) and Veronica Glueck (New York State Prohibition Officers Association) spoke on governmental issues surrounding sober homes.



Pia Riverso, James and Catherine McWilliam and Stephanie Marquesano (The Harris Project), provided poignant personal accounts of their relatives harrowing experiences while they were living in sober homes. James and Catherine McWilliams talked about their son, Hank, who entered a sober facility in Yorktown in November 2015. Although his actions and care were supposed to be monitored closely, Hank tragically died a month later.

Justin Gurland and Zac Clark (Release Recovery), John Haley (Seafield Center), Maureen McKenna (Rockaway Houses), Van Smith (Recovery Houses of Westchester) and Nancy Magliocca (St. John's Riverside Hospital) gave testimony about treatment, house codes and

insurance payment regarding sober homes.

"I have been Assistant Director for Rockaway Houses for over eleven years," Ms. McKenna noted. "We believe that with the right guidance and support, the options for a better life for a person in recovery are limitless. Our guests attend two AA/NA meetings a week and if applicable, substance abuse or mental health programs. We are not in this for the money, and many of our house managers and staff are former clients. We have the experience and we know how to run safe sober homes, and are more than willing to work with legislators to establish standards that would improve clients' chances for recovery."

The meeting concluded with comments from Dr. Alexandra Stratyner (National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence), Ellen Morehouse (Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers, Student Assistance Corporation), Mary Fox-Alter (Superintendent of Pleasantville Schools and a member of Pleasantville Strong) and Dr. Joseph Baudille (New York State Chiropractic Council).

Sober living homes have an alcohol and drug-free living environment for individuals attempting to abstain from drinking and substance abuse. Sober homes are not required to offer formal treatment services, but some mandate or encourage residents to attend 12-step self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. For the most part, the people who live in these types of facilities are expected to be responsible for themselves. People living in sober homes usually have to pay their own rent, buy their own food and do the same things they would do for themselves if they lived in a regular home, such as participating in household chores, working, and going to school. However, sober living facilities are not licensed or funded by state or local governments and the residents themselves pay for costs.