



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Leading the Fight Against Opioids in New York and the Nation

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE November 7, 2018

| ISSUE: **COMBATING HEROIN AND OPIOID ADDICTION, HEROIN & OPIOID TASK FORCE**



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REPORT UNVEILED



Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

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In the last decade, heroin and opioid addiction have affected every community in New York State, creating a public health crisis that we have never seen before. However, some statistics show that the numbers of overdoses and deaths might be improving thanks to efforts we have made to fight back against the spread of drugs in New York State.

As a member of the Senate Majority Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, I have been working with my colleagues to examine steps that will address this crisis through enforcement, prevention, recovery and treatment. Across the state, we have held numerous forums and public hearings to listen to people combatting addiction on the front lines.

Over the years, state funding has steadily increased to fund these initiatives, including a record \$247 million the Task Force successfully advocated for in this year's state budget. Recently, the group released a report examining the success of the initiatives we have implemented to address the crisis. This report also offers recommendations for future action, including:

- Increasing resources to support the recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals trained to treat substance use disorder;
- Upgrading the I-STOP Prescription Monitoring Program to improve interstate monitoring of potential over-prescribing of opioids;
- Maximizing federal funding to help support more children at the state's newly-established Infant Recovery Centers;
- Improve the use and collection of data to better identify, investigate, and prosecute high-volume opioid prescribers;
- Enhancing and creating appropriate criminal penalties for drug dealers who sell substances that result in death; and
- Reducing the cost of naloxone to ensure greater access to this life-saving overdose-reversal medication and enhance public education and outreach on naloxone use and expiration to ensure effective treatment; and
- Requiring enhanced treatment plans for patients after the first month of opioid use, instead of waiting until the current 90-day standard.

In recent years, I have been fighting alongside law enforcement and community groups to help stop the drug epidemic in Central and Northern New York. One way I am doing so is through my “Shed the Meds” drug-take back events. This year, I teamed up with local hospitals, community groups and law enforcement agencies to host events that helped collect nearly 400 pounds of expired or unwanted medications from people. These events help to ensure prescription pills do not end up in the wrong hands, as well as help protect our environment by providing an opportunity for proper disposal.

In addition, I was able to successfully advocate for Jefferson County to take part in a pilot program involving 16 county jails across the state. The jails will be provided with funding for assessment, education and counseling services for addicted inmates, along with peer support and discharge planning services, which will not only help people continue their path to recovery from substance abuse outside of jail, but cut down on arrest costs, court costs, jail costs and more. Once through the pilot phase, the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction plans to push for counseling service funding for every county in New York State.

I have also been proud to support legislation that aims to crack down on drug dealers, as well as to secure funds that are helping to provide in-school drug education programs that are teaching students at a young age about the danger of addiction.

Drugs have the power to destroy lives, pull apart families and threaten the safety of our communities. That is why it is so important to continue to take steps that will crack down on illegal substances, help people break free from the cycle of addiction and protect the health and safety of people here in our region, as well as across New York State.