



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham's Bill Ensures Addiction Services Commissioner Included in Emergency Response

PETE HARCKHAM May 27, 2020

| ISSUE: **CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC; COVID-19, EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**



Albany, NY – New legislation sponsored by New York State Senate Pete Harckham guaranteeing the state commissioner from the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) will be included as a member of the state's disaster management team was approved unanimously in the Senate today.

“The many state residents who are under care for mental health issues and Substance Use Disorder require commissioner-level representation when planning for and responding to an emergency,” said Harckham. “The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that treatment providers are on the frontline and deserve the same considerations that are now extended to medical care providers. I appreciate the support my Senate colleagues have shown this bill, which simply strengthens the state’s overall planning model and now allows better protections for our residents in need.”

Harckham discovered at a statewide roundtable he had convened of Substance Use Treatment providers and association leaders, as the novel coronavirus pandemic surged in New York, that providers were left out of the initial conversation regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing. The coordination efforts of the NYS Office of Emergency Management (OEM) include various other state agencies and liaisons with municipalities, businesses and not-for-profits—entities that behavioral health and substance use providers are working with as well. Harckham’s bill calls on OEM to acknowledge the frontline status of these providers from the start, rather than as an afterthought—and while too many residents fall through the cracks.

Added Harckham, “In this regard, making room for OASAS in emergency planning is part of the larger effort to save lives.”

Also, the dire circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic—closed facilities, reduced access to supervised care and medication, social isolation—have resulted in an increase of fatal overdoses and behavioral health crises among residents. The emergency care from treatment service providers, many under resourced already, highlights the critical role that OASAS certified providers play in combating the mental health fallout of this particular health emergency.

“People working on the frontlines of the worsening addiction and overdose epidemic are also heroically fighting Covid-19, particularly in residential, inpatient, and a variety of outpatient settings,” said John Coppola, executive director of the New York Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP). “This important legislation corrects an oversight and strengthens New York’s emergency response team by incorporating OASAS’s important expertise.”

A link to Harckham’s speech in the Senate on the OASAS bill prior to the vote can be found on his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/57594457105/videos/569260357109056/>.