



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

Senator Metzger's Community Conversations Series Examines the Opioid Epidemic during COVID-19 with Catholic Charities CEO, Middletown Police Chief, and Ulster County Sheriff

JEN METZGER June 5, 2020

| ISSUE: **BATTLING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC, SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT, CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC; COVID-19**



Hudson Valley and Catskills, NY...State Senator Jen Metzger (SD-42) yesterday led a facebook livestream discussion of the opioid epidemic in the region as overdoses have spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this [tenth episode](#) of her [Community Conversations](#) online series, Senator Metzger was joined by City of Middletown Police Chief John Ewanciw, Ulster

County Sheriff Juan Figueroa, and Dr. Dean Scher of Catholic Charities, which provides substance abuse treatment and prevention services in Sullivan, Ulster, and Orange Counties.

The conversation focused on the impacts of the pandemic on opioid use and prevention and treatment efforts, as well as programs and strategies to fight the epidemic. Some of the main takeaways from the discussion included the following points:

- Overdoses in all three counties have increased during the pandemic compared to the same months last year. Contributing factors are the stress and anxiety that many are experiencing during the pandemic, as well as the social isolation.
- Building closures and social distancing protocols have made the delivery of in-person treatment especially challenging due to the pandemic, but alternatives have been put into place as the crisis evolves.
- Educating young people about opioid misuse and making them aware of the prevention services and resources available is critical in thwarting and identifying potential abuse.
- Reducing the stigma around substance use disorders is a critical step in creating awareness on the science of chronic health conditions so that people can get the treatment they need.
- When an individual is struggling with addiction, resources for families and loved ones are essential as recovery impacts an individual's entire support system.

"Mental health experts continuously note that isolation, economic stress, and general uncertainty from the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting us all, and unfortunately, these factors appear to have contributed to a significant increase in drug overdoses in these last two months," **said Senator Metzger**. "We need to double down on our efforts in prevention and treatment, working with local law enforcement, county health departments, community-based organizations, schools, and other partners as we continue to navigate this pandemic,

and beyond.”

In February, the State Senate passed 17 bills to address different aspects of the opioid crisis, focusing on medical education and training, opioid-prescribing, access to overdose reversal medications, insurance, and access to evidence-based person-centered treatment, among other areas. Senator Metzger co-sponsored 13 of those bills, and carried [S5653-A](#), directing the Department of Health to periodically examine data from the prescription drug monitoring registry to ensure there is no inappropriate or illegal prescribing, frequently referred to as “pill mills.”

John Ewanciw, City of Middletown Police Chief said, “New York state has made significant investments in Criminal Justice Reform, however we have failed to target changes for individuals that are in the grips of opioid addiction. Education, rehabilitation and diversionary programs could provide individuals the necessary tools to overcome this scourge on our community.”

Dr. Dean Scher, CEO of Catholic Charities of Orange, Sullivan, and Ulster counties said, “Catholic Charities is extremely grateful to Senator Metzger for maintaining a consistent focus on the use of opioids and other substances in our community. While the isolation and fear associated with the pandemic has increased the stress on everyone, it has been especially hard for those who are in recovery or actively battling the disease of addiction. As a result of people turning to substances to cope, we are experiencing a spike in use and overdoses. It’s important for people to know that treatment resources, like Catholic Charities, remain open and available to help and support those who are struggling. Getting the word out through these community conversations is critical to people accessing service.”

Senator Metzger’s [Community Conversations](#) series streams live on Thursdays at 5:00 PM on [her Facebook page](#), engaging local experts in discussions on COVID-19 topics important to

Hudson Valley and Catskill communities. [Next Thursday's episode](#) will welcome Amanda Lavallo, Director of Ulster County Department of the Environment and facilitator of Project Resilience, and Sims Foster, Co-Founder of Foster Supply Hospitality, for a discussion on promising innovations in food security and rural agriculture.

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RELATED LEGISLATION

2019-S5653A

- Introduced

- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to analysis of data in the prescription monitoring program registry

May 10, 2019

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by **Jen Metzger**

Do you support this bill?