



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' ~ for the week of October 11, 2021 ~ 'Opioid Settlement Fund already providing benefits'

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 12, 2021

| ISSUE: **BATTLING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC**



The new Opioid Settlement Fund and a renewed commitment to combating this epidemic that can stem from it promises to enhance our efforts to rebuild shattered lives and prevent countless tragic deaths.

Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and

policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "**Opioid Settlement Fund already providing benefits**"

Back in June, in the closing days of the 2021 legislative session, the Senate and Assembly unanimously approved a new law establishing an “Opioid Settlement Fund.”

The new law, which I helped co-sponsor and strongly supported, is now beginning to make a difference. Its approval could not have been timelier. Recent reports have shown that there was a sharp rise in opioid-related deaths nationwide and throughout the Southern Tier in 2020. Most local counties saw an increase in opioid-related fatalities last year. Another troubling spike is seemingly underway this year.

The creation of the Opioid Settlement Fund finally ensures that any funding the state receives from opioid-related lawsuit settlements and other actions against opioid manufacturers and distributors must be dedicated to education, prevention, treatment, and recovery programs and services in communities across the state.

As I said at the time of the law’s enactment, it’s the right thing to do. It’s one of the highlights of this year’s legislative session.

The opioid abuse epidemic has taken thousands of lives and ravaged communities and families across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and throughout New York State. As a member of the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, we held hearings locally and statewide several years ago to hear directly from the front lines of this epidemic – health care experts, substance abuse counselors, law enforcement, social services, families who have lost loved ones, and recovering addicts themselves – to help develop an ongoing strategy to better confront this crisis.

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Specifically, the new law (S7194/A6395, Chapter 190 of the Laws of 2021) states that “all funds received by the state as the result of a settlement or a judgment in litigation against opioid manufacturers, distributors, dispensers, consultants, or resellers shall be deposited into the opioid settlement fund, and that such funds shall not supplant or replace existing state funding.”

Last week, New York State Attorney General Letitia James began the initial distributions to counties statewide of as much as \$1.5 billion from the settlement of a series of lawsuits to hold opioid manufacturers and distributors accountable.

“For more than two decades,” the attorney general said, “New Yorkers have experienced the dire and deadly effects of opioids...The funds we’re infusing into New York today and going forward will be used towards combating this epidemic with investments in prevention, treatment, and recovery. While no amount of money will ever compensate for the millions of addictions, the hundreds of thousands of deaths, or the countless families torn apart by opioids, this money will be vital in preventing future devastation.”

According to the attorney general, counties comprising the 58th Senate District are in line to receive the following initial funding:

- Chemung County, approximately \$1.03 to \$1.8 million;
- Schuyler County, approximately \$175,000 to \$305,800;
- Steuben County, approximately \$955,885 to \$1.67 million;
- Tompkins County, approximately \$990,000 to \$1.7 million; and
- Yates County, \$approximately \$208,000 to \$364,000.

All said, it’s a timely and positive action. The creation of this Opioid Settlement Fund puts a stop, in this instance, to a long-standing and questionable practice of New York State taking settlement funds and dumping them into the state’s general fund to be used for any purpose at all.

What we have said here is: Not this time.

Not when the opioid crisis has been ravaging families and communities.

Not when the opioid epidemic has cost thousands of lives.

Not when this public health emergency will continue to demand more and more resources for education and prevention, and treatment and recovery.

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