



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Higgins, Kennedy Take Action to Stop Prescription Drug Abuse

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ISSUE:

- [Health](#)
- [Controlled Substances](#)
- [Drugs](#)



Congressman, Senator join the family of Michael David Israel, other local advocates to encourage Western New Yorkers to fight the epidemic

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-27) and N.Y. State Senator Timothy M. Kennedy (58th District) announced actions they are taking to address the growing epidemic of prescription drug abuse. This announcement comes just days after U.S. Attorney William Hochul and N.Y. Attorney General Eric Schneiderman hosted a summit calling for action to fight the prescription painkiller problem and as the nation kicks off Red Ribbon week (October 23-31) an annual anti-drug awareness campaign.

At a press conference Monday at Kids Escaping Drugs, Higgins pinpointed to the need for additional advancements in health information technology as critical step in this fight. Kennedy outlined a series of prescription drug reforms he introduced called the “Michael David Israel Laws” – named for a young Western New Yorker who lost his life after his battle with prescription drug addiction.

Avi and Julie Israel, the parents of Michael David Israel, joined Higgins and Kennedy in calling on Western New Yorkers to join them in the fight against prescription drug abuse. Mr. and Mrs. Israel, along with friends and family, have started an organization called “Save the Michaels of the World” to raise awareness and urge lawmakers to act on this pressing issue. In addition to meeting with many local leaders, the group has already grown to about 1,200 members on Facebook.

"Michael was an extremely outgoing, bright kid, who excelled in school, and who was a pleasure to be around," **said Avi Israel.** "If people do not become aware of this flawed system there will continue to be individuals like Michael who fall victim to prescription drug abuse. We are imploring legislators like Congressman Higgins and Senator Kennedy as well as members of the WNY community to take action and are grateful for their swift response to this growing problem."

"Far too many families have endured tragedies as a result of prescription drug addiction," **Senator Kennedy said.** "The wrath of this epidemic has been felt locally in Western New York and throughout the nation. We need to stand together and take action against prescription drug abuse before it can claim another life. I believe the comprehensive approach we're proposing in Albany will help prevent addiction, protect the vulnerable, punish the corrupt and ultimately save lives."

"The United States is behind the curve in supporting health information technologies that can provide interoperability to drastically reduce this alarming trend," **said Congressman Higgins.** "We need to give doctors and patients the tools to make sure situations like Michael's never happen again."

Senator Kennedy has introduced the Michael David Israel Laws as four separate bills which together represent a comprehensive approach to addressing the prescription drug abuse epidemic. The new bills target training for health practitioners, patient access to information, addiction transition and reform to the controlled substance abuse registry.

The Michael David Israel Laws include:

- **Doctor's Training Law** – Doctors, nurse practitioners and pharmacists would be required to complete three hours of continuing education each year on the impacts and warning signs of addiction, as well as methods to migrate patients from addictive drugs to lower-risk solutions.
- **Patient Information Act** – Before prescribing any opiate analgesics or psychotropic drugs, doctors and pharmacists would be required to make patients aware of the dangers and risks of addiction and to provide them with information about coping with addiction and local resources available for help.
- **Addiction Transition Law** – The Department of Health (DOH) would be required to promulgate recommendations for prescribers to transition patients from highly addictive pharmaceuticals to lower-risk pain management

solutions.

- **Controlled Substance Registry Reform Act** – DOH will be required to develop a “real-time” reporting system for the controlled substance registry. Both doctors and pharmacists will be granted access to the controlled substance registry, and they will be required to check the registry for indicators of abuse or addiction prior to writing or filling a prescription. DOH will also develop a system of penalties for failing to check the registry.

Congressman Higgins has been an avid supporter of electronic medical record implementation as a means for health professionals to better exchange patient information, avoid medical errors and generally encourage better outcomes. He supported the HITECH Act in 2009 which created the Beacon grant program allowing HEALTHeLINK, the Western New York Clinical Exchange, to become a national outlier in the integration of Electronic Medical Records. To date 290,000 patients in 8 Western New York counties have opted into HEALTHeLINK, which enables doctors to communicate with one another and prevent addiction and abuse before it starts.

In a 2009 survey of 11 countries only 46% of U.S. doctors use electronic medical records compared to over 90% in Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden & the UK. Higgins says this nation should take swift action toward comprehensive health IT implementation.

Higgins is also cosponsoring the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 2011 (HR1925) which would provide better educational tools for health professionals and consumers, clinical guidelines for methadone use, and federal support for treatment programs.

From 1997 to 2007, the use of prescription opioids in the United State has increased 402%. Addiction or abuse is an increasing problem in Western New York where prescription drug use 70 percent higher than the state average.

With the number of lives lost and families affected constantly increasing, Avi and Julie Israel urged the public to get involved by calling on their representatives at the state and federal levels to support legislation to end the prescription drug abuse epidemic.

You can join “Save the Michaels of the World” online at:
<http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/151224488286541/>.