



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Local Anti-Rx Drug Abuse Advocates Visit Albany to Push for Reform

Timothy M. Kennedy

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***Save the Michaels of the World, an advocacy group founded in Buffalo, makes first lobbying trip to the State Capitol***

ALBANY, N.Y. – With communities throughout our state and nation experiencing the effects of the growing epidemic of prescription drug abuse, a group led by local advocates is fighting for reform to a system that has failed far too many families.

The group, known as Save the Michaels of the World, visited Albany Tuesday – in the first of what is sure to become many trips to the State Capitol – to urge state legislators to take action against prescription drug addiction.

Avi and Julie Israel of Buffalo formed Save the Michaels of the World after the death of their son, Michael, who took his own life while battling addiction to painkillers. In

the months since his death, Avi and Julie have built the group to be over 1300-members-strong, and they have been lobbying lawmakers to enact reform legislation.

In addition to promoting Attorney General Eric Schneiderman's I-STOP legislation (S.5720/A.8320), which is being carried by Senator Andrew Lanza and Assemblyman Michael Cusick, Save the Michaels of the World has been advocating for four bills that have been named for Michael Israel. The Michael David Israel Laws – which are sponsored in the Senate by Senator Tim Kennedy and in the Assembly by Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes – include:

- Patient Information Act (S.6179/A. 9097): Requires disclosure of addiction risks for certain prescription drugs; requires physicians, nurses and pharmacists to provide information on prevention, mitigation and treatment of prescription drug addiction.
- Physician Training Law (S.6180/S.9102): Relates to continuing medical education requirements for doctors, nurses and pharmacists; requires three hours of training on the prevention, treatment and mitigation of opiate analgesics and psychotropic drug addiction.
- Addiction Transition Law (S.6181/A.9093): Requires the Department of Health to draft guidelines for the transition of patients from substances with a high risk of addiction to those with a low risk.
- Controlled Substance Registry Reform Act (S.5049A/A.9121): Requires practitioners to check the controlled substance abuse registry before prescribing painkillers and directs the commissioner of public health to establish an enforcement system.

Bill sponsors Senator Kennedy and Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes, as well as Senator George Mazarz and Assemblyman Sean Ryan, helped connect Avi and Julie Israel to multiple key lawmakers whose support will be an important component of bill passage.

Throughout their day in Albany, Save the Michaels of the World met Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver; Senator John Sampson, leader of the Senate Democratic Conference; Senator Kemp Hannon, chair of the Senate Health Committee; Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, chair of the Assembly Health Committee; Assemblyman Joseph Lentol, chair of the Assembly Committee on Codes; Assemblyman Michael Cusick; Assemblywoman Jane Corwin and many others.

“It was more than what we expected. On just our first trip, we met with many important lawmakers, several important committee chairmen – leaders whose support will be critical to our efforts,” said Avi Israel. “Everyone was sympathetic to our cause. Everyone understood the urgency of this issue, and everyone promised that something will be done this year, in this session. This is just the first of many trips, since we will not stop until Albany takes action. We already have the next round of meetings tentatively planned for early February.”

“Far too many families have endured tragedies as a result of prescription drug addiction. It’s absolutely urgent that we address this issue this year,” said Senator Kennedy. “Save the Michaels of the World has been relentlessly advocating for reform to end prescription drug abuse, and we’ve been proud to stand with them in this fight. There is a lot of work to do, and Avi and Julie Israel have gotten us off to a great start as we push forward with our efforts.”

Save the Michaels of the World plans to return to Albany in the coming weeks to continue their fight against prescription drug abuse and their push for critical reform legislation.

You can follow their ongoing efforts on the groups Facebook page, which can be accessed at: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/151224488286541/>.

Michael Israel’s story is heartbreaking, and too many families have suffered tragedies like his. Michael had Crohn’s Disease, a condition that was diagnosed when he was just a child. As Michael transitioned to the adult health care system, several attending physicians and medical specialists prescribed him numerous controlled substances. Due to a lack of training in addiction medicine and an absence of coordinated care, including timely communication among health care professionals, Michael fell through the cracks and further into illness. He developed the disease of addiction because the system continued to fail him, causing him to lose hope of recovering his health or quality of living. At the age of 20 years, Michael took his own life. His death was most certainly preventable.