



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Named to Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction

PATTY RITCHIE March 17, 2014

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Panel Will Develop Recommendations to Prevent and Treat Addiction and Its Related Crimes

State Senator Patty Ritchie has announced she has been named to the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, a group organized to examine the rise in use of heroin and other opioids in New York State and develop recommendations for treating and preventing addiction.

“Heroin is an extremely addictive drug that has the power to ruin lives and destroy families. In Central and Northern New York, we’ve seen an alarming increase in its usage and according to officials, in some areas, the price of the drug has been cut in half,” said Senator Ritchie, who is a member of the Senate’s Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committee.

“I’m pleased to be a part of this task force and am looking forward to working with my colleagues in an effort to develop initiatives and measures that will help put a stop to the use of these deadly drugs.”

According to law enforcement officials in Central and Northern New York, there has been a dramatic spike in heroin cases in the past several years. In Jefferson County, there were 9 heroin seizures or recoveries in 2011. In 2013 that number increased to 63. In St. Lawrence County, heroin cases have jumped from 15 in 2012 to 57 in 2013. In Oswego County there were 35 heroin arrests in 2013.

Members of the task force will examine the issues and solicit input from experts and other stakeholders about addiction prevention and treatment options, the rise in heroin and opioid use, and the potential for drug-related crimes and other negative community impacts. The task force will then develop recommendations which will be used to draft legislation to address the issues raised.

In addition, the group will hold forums in communities across the state to solicit input from stakeholders and experts and use the information collected to develop recommendations for legislative action. The first forum will be held in April in Suffolk County with additional dates and locations for forums throughout the state to be announced.

A 2012 federal survey on drug use and health reported that the number of people who said they used heroin in the past 12 months rose from 373,000 people in 2007 to 669,000 people in 2012. The agency also reported that the number of people dependent on heroin rose, from 179,000 people in 2007 to 369,000 people in 2011.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in 2011, 4.2 million Americans aged 12 or older (or 1.6 percent) said they had used heroin at least once in their lives. The NIH estimates that approximately 23 percent of individuals who use heroin become dependent on this highly addictive drug.

In the Senate's budget resolution passed last week, \$5 million was proposed for increased heroin prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. The resolution also included a measure to increase the penalties for drug dealers by making it a class B felony for anyone to possess 50 or more individual packets of heroin and/or an amount of heroin with an aggregate value of at least \$300.