



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

Senator David J. Valesky joins Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction

DAVID J. VALESKY April 14, 2014

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SYRACUSE, N.Y.—State Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida) today announced that he has joined the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction to examine the rise in use of heroin and other opioids in New York State and develop recommendations for treating and preventing addiction.

“These drugs are highly addictive and extremely dangerous, and the increase in use that we’re seeing is deeply troubling,” Senator Valesky said. “Action is needed, and through this task force, I am hopeful we can do our part from a legislative perspective.”

The bipartisan task force will examine 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 that will be used to draft legislation to address the issues raised.

The task force will hold two of 12 statewide forums in Central New York: one in Utica on April 15 from 5-8 p.m. at the State Office Building, and one in Auburn on May 8 from 1-3 p.m.

at Auburn City Hall.

The recently passed State Budget contained \$2.45 million for initiatives to provide prevention, treatment and addiction services that address the growing problems of heroin and opioid abuse. In addition, the Senate passed legislation (S6477B) to help save lives by increasing access to a highly effective antidote for accidental drug overdose known as Naloxone or Narcan.

Heroin's deadly effects are well established, and overdoses are on the rise across the state. The Syracuse Post-Standard reported that heroin-related deaths "have climbed rapidly in Onondaga County -- from two in 2010 to 24 in 2013." Some experts have pointed to the enactment of I-STOP, a state law to curb the abuse of prescription opioids and other drugs, as one factor in the dramatic increase in the number of heroin users across New York in recent months. As prescription painkillers became more difficult to obtain and more expensive when sold illegally, individuals turned towards heroin because it is often cheaper and/or more easily obtained and provides a high similar to prescription opioids.

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.

The task force will also examine the crimes that accompany increases in illegal drug activity. In February, the New York Times reported that the federal Drug Enforcement Administration's heroin seizures in New York State increased 67 percent over the last four years. The DEA's New York office "seized 144 kilograms of heroin, nearly 20 percent of its seizures nationwide, valued at roughly \$43 million."