



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Taking Up the Fight Against Heroin Abuse

PATTY RITCHIE May 5, 2014

| ISSUE: **DRUGS**

Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

4.2 million. According to the National Institutes of Health, that's the number of Americans aged 12 or older who said they had used heroin once in their lives. What's even scarier? It's estimated that of those users, 23 percent will become dependent on this highly addictive and deadly drug.

Heroin abuse is a problem that's touching every corner of our state. There's no "typical" user—it's affecting people of all ages and of all walks of life. Here in our region, heroin use and fatal overdoses are on the rise, as more young adults are turning to the drug, which is becoming increasingly cheaper and is available in cities and rural communities across Central and Northern New York.

Recently, a bipartisan task force was launched to solicit input on the rise in use of heroin and opioids, and find solutions for treating addiction as well as its consequences. As part of this task force, 13 public forums were held across the state, including one I hosted in Watertown. At this forum, more than a dozen individuals—including reformed addicts, treatment experts and law enforcement officials from Central and Northern New York—shared heartbreaking stories of loss and solutions for fighting back.

In addition to the forum, many of you took the time to submit written testimony to me, sharing your personal experiences and suggestions for how we can halt heroin abuse and help those who are struggling with addiction. If you would like to view a video of the forum, [click here](#). To read a synopsis of the written testimony, [click here](#).

Gathering information and input from the public is the first step the task force is taking to develop recommendations for treating and preventing addiction to heroin and opioids. As the forums wrap up, I'll be sure to keep you posted on our efforts to safeguard the public from these dangerous drugs. Working

together, I'm confident we can make strides against drug abuse. If you have any concerns related to the topic of heroin abuse, or suggestions for fighting back, please don't hesitate to contact me.