



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael F. Nozzolio

Senator Nozzolio and the Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction Releases Report and Legislative Recommendations to Combat the Heroin and Opioid Epidemic

MICHAEL F. NOZZOLIO May 28, 2014

| ISSUE: **CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES**

Citing the need to stop the dramatic increase in the use of heroin and opioid-based illegal drugs, New York State Senator Mike Nozzolio joined today with his colleagues on the New York State Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction to release a report and legislative recommendations to combat the growing heroin and opioid epidemic.

“The Task Force’s roundtable discussion in Auburn clearly demonstrates that the heroin crisis has become an epidemic that is destroying countless lives and families across our State and Nation. No longer is heroin addiction only found in the inner big cities, but is all too prevalent in our suburbs, small cities and rural areas,” said Senator Nozzolio. “The focus of the Task Force is on providing additional resources for the prevention of drug abuse and the treatment of those addicted, while giving law enforcement officials the tools they need to prosecute criminals who are spreading heroin in our local communities.”

Over the past nine weeks, task force members held 18 forums across New York State, including the forum hosted by Senator Nozzolio in Auburn on May 8th. Task Force members traveled over 8,000 miles, spoke with over 2,100 residents, and listened to over 53 hours of testimony. Forum participants examined the issues surrounding the increase in drug abuse, addiction and drug related crimes, solicited input from experts and other stakeholders, and developed recommendations that were used to create a package of legislation to address these issues.

Testimony provided by dozens of experts, parents, and concerned New Yorkers at the forums directed the task force's legislative response to three key areas: preventing drug abuse and overdoses; increasing the availability and efficacy of addiction treatment; and enhancing the tools provided to law enforcement to keep heroin off the streets. As a result, the task force is recommending 25 bills for the Senate to consider during the 2014 legislative session.

"My Senate colleagues and I on the Task Force have taken all the recommendations from testimony across the State very seriously and have developed a comprehensive approach to a very complex problem," continued Senator Nozzolio. "As Vice-Chair of the Senate Task Force, I have heard hundreds of stories on the destructive impact of heroin and it is clear this epidemic crosses all ethnic, age, and socioeconomic boundaries. I thank the many families who shared their heart-breaking stories, including Michele Gentile and Kevin Jones of Auburn, who lost their daughter Jessica Gentile last

year to this rising epidemic.”

Throughout roundtable discussions across the State, parents told harrowing stories about loved ones addicted to opioids and the difficulty in receiving critical treatment. Law enforcement officials testified that they needed stronger tools to prevent criminals from putting more deadly drugs on the streets. Treatment and medical professionals urged lawmakers to treat opioid addiction as a disease, and for treatment to be made readily available.

Prevention groups and educators focused on eliminating the stigma associated with addiction and supported the creation of more programs to inform the public about the dangers of substance abuse. Recovering addicts advocated for more treatment options, more beds, and more recovery time.

“We cannot continue to put our families and communities at risk, the time for action is now before this epidemic can continue to grow. This is not a partisan issue and I urge the State Assembly and the Governor to join us in fighting the heroin and opioid scourge,” concluded Senator Nozzolio.

The full report can be viewed at <http://www.nysenate.gov/joint-senate-task-force-heroin-and-opioid-addiction-legislative-report>