



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Waging War on Synthetic Drugs

PATTY RITCHIE April 27, 2015

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Their names are innocent—"K2," "Spice," "Skunk," "Ninja," and "Moon Rocks"—however, these dangerous synthetic drugs are anything but. As we've seen on the news and in the paper, these substances, which are sold as alternatives to cocaine, heroin, marijuana and other illegal drugs, have the power to cause such side effects as hallucinations, kidney failure, extreme paranoia, violent behavior and even death.

First coming on the scene several years ago these substances—which are particularly popular with young people—are showing no signs of going away. Just this month, over a nine day period, more than 160 people in New York State were sent to the hospital for using synthetic marijuana, which is disguised as potpourri, herbal mixtures or incense. Often found in gas stations or head shops, the use of these substances isn't just a problem in New York State. Across the country, there's recently been a significant uptick in emergency room visits related to the use of synthetic marijuana. In addition, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, across the country nearly 2,000 calls related to the use of synthetic marijuana have been made since the beginning of the year—that's roughly four times as many emergency calls than the same period of time last year.

While steps have been taken at the state and federal level to ban the sale and possession of these substances, those who produce them are getting around the law, changing the chemical makeup of their drugs and pushing them out onto the streets. In an effort to fight back, I recently reintroduced measures, cosponsored by Assemblyman Will Barclay, to help crackdown on the use and sale of synthetic drugs, specifically synthetic marijuana. These measures—Senate bill 4720 and Senate bill 4712—address the issues of mislabeling, chemical compound swapping and also put stricter penalties in place for those who

use or sell these substances. In addition, they also include a very important component that gives the Commissioner of the Department of Health the power to add synthetic drugs to the list of prohibited substances, without approval from the State Legislature.

Synthetic drug use is a very serious problem—with very serious consequences. Getting these substances out of the hands of dealers and users, as well as off of store shelves is critically important to making sure the public, as well as our communities stay safe. In the weeks to come, I'll be continuing to push for measures that work towards those goals. For more information, and to stay up to date on steps being taken to put an end to the use of these dangerous substances, I invite you to visit my website, www.ritchie.nysenate.gov.