



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Senator Ortt Hosts Forum on Heroin and Opioid Addiction

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Niagara County Forum is the Third Out of Four to be Held This Spring

State Senator Rob Ortt (R-C-I, North Tonawanda), co-chair of the Senate's Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, today led the discussion on the growing threat of heroin and opioid abuse in our communities. The public forum, held at Niagara University, drew more than 100 concerned residents throughout the area.

Speakers on the panel included local law enforcement, educators, addiction specialists, health care professionals, elected officials and parents of children

affected by heroin and opioid addiction.

Tonight's forum was the third out of four being held across the state this spring as a way to solicit input from experts and community members. That input will then be collected to develop recommendations for legislative action.

"There are too many tragic stories about families who have lost loved ones to heroin and opioid abuse," said **Senator Robert Ortt (R-C-I, North Tonawanda)**.

"Enough is enough. Now is the time to rip the Band-Aid off and put an end to this epidemic once and for all. I commend everyone for speaking out at this forum tonight, sharing your stories and providing your expertise. I assure you I will work with my colleagues on the task force to compile your input into a comprehensive report, so that we can craft vital, sensible legislation that will prevent drug abuse and overdoses. More importantly, it'll help keep heroin off the streets and from falling into the hands of those most vulnerable."

Recent statistics show a pressing and urgent need to find a solution to the statewide opioid epidemic. Deaths from opioid overdoses in New York are increasing. This year alone, there have been at least 14 deaths reported throughout Niagara County.

According to the Niagara County Sheriff's Office, since Jan. 1, 2015, opioid-related reports in the 12 towns outside of the cities showed about 27 overdoses, 4 deaths, and 7 saves with Narcan, a counteragent.

Niagara County Sheriff James Voutour said, "Heroin and opioid use does not discriminate. The Niagara County Drug Task Force has witnessed a tremendous increase in opioid overdoses and deaths county-wide in the past year. These users come from all walks of life and from every corner of our county. Recently, lab analysis has revealed that fentanyl is being mixed in with heroin, and this deadly combination can immediately compromise the respiratory system of the user, causing death."

Since January 2015, the Niagara Falls Police Department and the Niagara Falls Fire Department reported 16 opioid-related overdoses – four of which resulted in death. So far this year, four people were saved with Narcan. In 2014, the fire department saved 10 people by administering the counteragent.

Niagara Falls Police Chief Bryan DalPorto said, "Like many places across the country, Niagara Falls has become victim to the epidemic of heroin and opioid abuse, addiction and deaths. This epidemic has grown to a scale so large it can only

be combated by local, state and federal entities working together and forming partnerships between police, politicians, and health care professionals.”

Since the start of this year, the City of Lockport Police Department reported 11 overdoses, 3 deaths and 4 Narcan saves. North Tonawanda also reported high numbers for this year with 10 overdoses, 3 deaths, and 6 saves with Narcan.

The opioid challenge is broad-based and knows no geographic bounds, with Orleans, Monroe and numerous other counties reporting opioid-related deaths.

Niagara University Counseling Services Director Monica Romeo, PhD, LMHC, said, “Statistics inform us that .3% of college students use heroin (SAMHSA, 2013). While that number may be small in comparison with the use of other substances, the educational, personal and financial impacts of heroin use are staggering for the student, as well as for the people who are part of that student’s life.”

Avi Israel’s 20-year-old son Michael committed suicide in June 2011 after struggling with addiction. He was addicted to pain killers that were prescribed to him by several different doctors. Through his organization, Save the Michaels of the World, Avi has created awareness of prescription drug addiction, overdose and suicide, and has helped to shape legislation into law. I-STOP, or “Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing,” was signed into law in 2012.

“My son Michael was prescribed into addiction by three doctors who were treating him for Crohn's disease,” said **Israel**. “Michael took his life after not being able to get the treatment he needed. The doctors did not want Michael to die, however, the lack of education on their side caused his addiction and death.”

The Senate’s Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction was created in 2014. The Task Force issued a comprehensive report to prevent drug abuse and overdoses; increase the availability and efficacy of addiction treatment; and enhance the tools provided to law enforcement to keep heroin off the streets. The report included legislative recommendations that lead to the Senate’s passage of 23 bills to address issues surrounding the increase in heroin and opioid abuse, addiction, and related crimes in New York.

A final package of new laws was enacted to include: increasing public awareness; establishing school drug prevention programs; increasing the effectiveness of overdoses prevention; creating a new model of detoxification and transitional

services; establishing a relapse prevention demonstration program; enabling parents to seek services for children suffering from substance abuse; and promoting the affordability of substance abuse services.

The new laws also provided additional resources to law enforcement, including: assisting Health Department Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement Investigators; adding fraud and deceit of prescription medication to penal law; creating the criminal offense of “criminal sale of a controlled substance by a practitioner or pharmacist”; and making the “criminal sale of a controlled substance by a practitioner or pharmacist” offense eligible for prosecution under the enterprise corruption statute.

Tonight’s forum will help legislators evaluate state measures that may need to be taken to further reduce drug abuse in New York, and examine the issues created by increased heroin abuse that is causing hundreds of deaths in communities across the state.

The next forum will be held in Albany County on Tuesday, June 2, at SUNY Albany D'Ambra Auditorium in Albany. Additional forums across the state will be held this fall.