



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## SENATOR KLEIN HOSTS NEW YORK'S FIRST SUMMIT ON SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS

JEFFREY D. KLEIN | October 9, 2015

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*With more than 150 emergency room visits per week, K2 summit works to find coordinated solutions to combat synthetic drugs*

**BRONX, NY - Senate Independent Democratic Conference Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester)** today hosted New York's first K2 summit – convening top elected officials, health experts, city and state agencies and enforcement officials in New York to address the synthetic drug crisis that's sweeping the nation.

**Senator Jeff Klein said:** "K2 has devastated families and destroyed lives from upstate to downstate. We need to stop this public health epidemic in its tracks and develop coordinated solutions to knock K2 out of New York. I'm proud to host the state's first K2 summit to bring together the best and the brightest to combat this dangerous drug and protect New York's families and communities. I will continue to collaborate with my colleagues in government and fight for the passage of my comprehensive K2 legislation in the state Senate."

The summit, moderated by Senator Klein, featured heartbreaking testimony from a mother whose son's life was taken by K2. Panels featured representatives from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), New York Police Department (NYPD), New York State and New York City Department of Health (DOH), New

York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), representatives from the Bronx, Kings, Queens, Manhattan and Richmond District Attorneys' offices and more.

Panel discussions focused on the scope of the synthetic drug crisis from three perspectives: health and human services, law enforcement and prosecution. Topics included the depths of the crisis nationwide, disproportionate populations use of K2 and how we can both strengthen and enhance city, state and federal law to create a coordinated response to synthetic cannabinoids.

**Senator David J. Valesky, Deputy Leader of the Independent Democratic Conference (D-Oneida),**

**said:** “The use and sale of synthetic marijuana in New York state is a serious public health concern that knows no difference between upstate and downstate. From our children being easily targeted through sly, false marketing to our health care providers being forced to quickly find treatment for hundreds of unknown substances in a person using synthetic marijuana – the negative effects are far-reaching in our communities throughout the state. As Vice-Chairman of the Senate Health Committee, I stand ready with my colleagues to provide any and all legislative solutions to address and combat the sale, use and abuse of this highly dangerous drug.”

**Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj (D-Bronx) said:** “K2, synthetic marijuana is the most dangerous drug on our streets right now because it is so readily available and inexpensive to us and our youth; the sales must be stopped. This round table discussion is a very resourceful way to express our concerns and discuss the answers on how to help our communities with this crisis. K2 is a problem that affects us all and needs to be stopped.”

**Public Advocate Letitia James said:** “We have to work together to address the rising use of K2 in our communities. Drug use is a threat to public health and safety, and we must educate

ourselves to stop the spread of K2. I want to thank Senator Klein for his leadership on this issue at the state level.”

**Council Member Ritchie Torres (D-Bronx) said:** “I applaud Senator Klein for convening this important K2 summit to develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle synthetic marijuana and make sure that it is off the streets. This dangerous drug is claiming too many lives and it will take officials from all levels of government, medical professionals, law enforcement and community members to put a stop to K2. I look forward to being a part of this ongoing conversation that will produce concrete solutions.”

**Council Member Andrew Cohen (D-Bronx) said:** “K2 is a falsely marketed, poisonous substance that is creating a public health hazard. We must educate our communities on the dangers of this drug and continue to push for legislation that will make the sale of K2 a criminal act. Recently, I co-sponsored several City Council bills that will deter the sale of K2 and impose financial penalties on those that violate the proposed synthetic drug prohibition. As the Chair of the City’s Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services, I would like to thank Senator Klein for his leadership in coordinating this summit so that we are able gain insight on how to take a stand against this extremely dangerous substance.”

**Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. said:** “I am glad to see proposed changes in both city and state law that will make it difficult for children to access and consume this dangerous product. I applaud the work of Senate Majority Coalition Leader Jeff Klein, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Assembly Member Mark Gjonaj and others on the scourge of K2. This dangerous drug has become a major problem in our borough and in our city, and I am proud to be a part of this summit as we examine potential solutions.”

In the last month, New York City hospitals have seen nearly 800 emergency room visits related to the use of K2. On average, Bellevue, Elmhurst, Harlem, Jacobi, Lincoln, Metropolitan and Woodhull have seen 150 emergency room visits per week, with Lincoln Hospital seeing a disproportionate number of cases involving synthetic cannabinoids.

Senator Klein has been on the frontlines combating the use of synthetic drugs since 2012, when he first released an alarming investigative report, “Not for Human Consumption: The New Designer Drug Problem.” He has intensified his efforts in recent months following the rapid proliferation of K2 in New York.

In September, Senator Klein launched his “K.O. K2” campaign and announced that more than 1,700 Bronx bodegas have pledged not to sell synthetic marijuana. That same month, Senator Klein released a new report, “The Online Smoke Shop,” detailing the K2 drug trade in cyberspace. “The Online Smoke Shop” found a budding market for K2 and its paraphernalia on internet classifieds and auction sites like eBay, Craigslist and Backpage.

In July, Senator Klein introduced legislation in the state Senate that would criminalize the sale of K2. The proposed legislation would add “synthetic cannabinoids” to the pre-existing crimes of selling marijuana under New York State’s penal law and provide five degrees of criminal sale – ranging from a class “B” misdemeanor to a class “C” felony – depending on the weight of synthetic cannabinoid sold.

Senator Klein’s legislation would also crack down on businesses by increasing penalties for those found selling K2. His legislation would amend the General Business Law to increase fines for businesses found in violation to \$2,000 for the first offense, \$5,000 for the second offense and the third violation would result in the loss of a store owner’s liquor, tobacco and lottery license.

Senator Klein also carries legislation that would add an analog statute to the state's controlled substances law, making any analog of a Controlled 1 or 2 substance illegal. While the state Senate has passed the measure three times, the state Assembly has failed to take action.

**James J. Hunt, special agent in charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, New York Division, said:** "What is referred to on the street as K2, Spice or synthetic marijuana is not safe, nor is it marijuana. K2 is a synthetic chemical, sprayed on plant material and sold as a cheap high on the street. This is a new drug, it has created a new market and a new user. Today's round table is an opportunity to gather our collective resources to fight this new public health threat."

**Dr. Mary T. Bassett, commissioner of the New York City Department of Health, said:** "The New York City Health Department is very concerned about the health effects of synthetic cannabinoids like K2. Among those most affected are the residents of our poorest neighborhoods, residents of shelters, and those with psychiatric illness. These products vary in both composition and potency. As a result, health risks of K2 are unpredictable and dangerous. Signs and symptoms of K2 can range from nausea and vomiting to high blood pressure, seizures, and hallucinations. Agitation is commonly reported, but contrary to many reports, violent behavior is rare."

**Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown said:** "So-called synthetic marijuana has become a serious health and law enforcement problem in our city – especially among young adults. I commend Senator Klein for organizing today's round table discussion and bringing together experts in the field, including representatives from law enforcement and health care, to share ideas and work on a solution to this growing crisis."

**Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. said:** “While the sale and distribution of K2 and other synthetic cannabinoids is now a criminal offense in New York City, imitation drugs continue to affect the health, safety, and quality of life of many communities. I applaud the City Council for recognizing these substances for what they are—dangerous drugs that can have life-threatening consequences for users—and Sen. Klein for his leadership on this issue. A statewide imperative still remains to criminalize the commercialization of these harmful substances and address related issues of enforcement, abuse, and individual well-being.”

**Michael Powers, president of NYSCOPBA, said:** “I appreciate the opportunity to join Senator Klein and other stakeholders at today's round table to discuss the rise in use of synthetic marijuana, commonly known as K2. We need to find real solutions to deal with this growing epidemic, that not only have become a serious problem in our communities, but in our state prisons as well. K2 has grown to become a popular contraband that has made its way into our correctional facilities. It has dire consequences, not only for the inmates that use it, but for the staff that have to respond to inmates who become violent as a result of using it. I commend Senator Klein for putting this round table together on an issue that needs to be immediately addressed.”

**Jody Rudin, DHS deputy commissioner for Adult Services, said:** “As a social services agency assisting a vast array of clients, DHS must ensure its staff and providers are aware of the danger of this product and its potential side effects. We are committed to ensuring the safety and security of our clients, staff, and the surrounding communities, and look forward to collaborating with city agency partners going forward.”

**Lewis Cruz, a Bronx father whose son is addicted to K2, said:** “What I've personally experienced from watching my son while on K2 was actually very heartbreaking. K2 needs to be banned period. All it is doing is killing the insides of an individual little by little. The hospital emergency rooms are just filling up with people who have been using it. The people who are

manufacturing and selling K2 should be punished. We have to stop it before it starts to reach our younger children. I support Senator Klein's legislation in making K2 illegal and I am hoping this summit will help to pass this legislation.”

**Deirdre Canaday, an upstate New York mother whose son passed away from K2 use, said:** “It is a great privilege for myself, a single mother, who lost her only son four years ago at the age of 26 to the deadly effects of synthetic marijuana, to join forces with Senator Klein. I will stand behind any and all efforts to bring awareness to the public of the ever increasing threat of synthetic drugs, the alluring packaging of which, are created solely to target our youth. The proposed increased legislative measures sought by Senator Klein are critical in addressing loopholes that have existed in current laws for far too long and that have been exploited with no regard to human life or livelihood by the heartless purveyors of this poison. I personally applaud the efforts, courage and foresight of Senator Klein and any and all legislators who support the proposed measures.”