



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## A NEW MEASURE TO HELP FIGHT HEROIN ADDICTION: SENATOR RITCHIE'S WEEKLY COLUMN

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| ISSUE: **DRUG ABUSE**



Open the paper or turn on the news, and you'll see evidence that heroin abuse is a growing problem in communities across Central and Northern New York and beyond. As we continue to fight back against this deadly drug, one common theme has emerged from possible solutions to stopping its spread—and that's getting those who use the substance the real help they need to break free from its grip.

As a member of the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, I've been studying ways to combat the heroin epidemic. Recently, I was pleased to introduce bipartisan legislation (S.6478-A) along with Assemblyman Al Stirpe, who represents parts of Central New York, which would require insurers to cover up to 90 days of inpatient treatment for drug abusers. Under current law, insurers are required to provide coverage for inpatient treatment, but no time limits are established. As a result, doctors, abusers and their loved ones have all cited examples of addicts finding themselves reentering the downward spiral of addiction before being fully healed.

A lack of access to treatment was also one of the major issues identified by the Senate Task Force and expressed at a forum I hosted on heroin and opioid abuse as one of the major reasons for an uptick in overdose deaths in recent years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 47,055 people in the United States lost their lives to drug overdoses in 2014. 61 percent of those deaths involved heroin, and since 2010 deaths resulting from overdoses of the drug have tripled.

This recently announced measure builds on work we've done in the past to expand access to treatment. But, as the numbers show, there's still much more work to be done when it comes to helping addicts fully recover and stopping the spread of heroin on our streets. I'm hopeful that through this measure, we can take another step in the fight against this deadly drug.