



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Fred Akshar

## Akshar Hosts First Senate Heroin Task Force Meeting in the 52nd Senate District

FRED AKSHAR April 15, 2016

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On Wednesday, Senator Fred Akshar hosted a special hearing of the New York State Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction at Chenango Valley High School.

The Task Force listened to a panel of over 25 local experts from the fields of addiction treatment, healthcare, law enforcement along with local parents who have faced the horrors of addiction first hand. This was the first Senate Heroin Task Force meeting held in the 52nd Senate District. The panel represented one of the largest and most diverse gathering of

stakeholders in the fight against heroin addiction.

The hearing focused on three goals: 1) Explore local successes in the battle against heroin addiction, 2) Identify the remaining gaps in services and 3) Discuss the state's role in reducing barriers to care and strengthening New York's approach to addiction.

“It's incumbent upon all of us to set our political differences and our personalities aside because if we don't do that, we're going to stifle progress,” said Akshar. “The people we will end up hurting are the people we're trying to help.”

Among the topics discussed were the layers of regulations imposed by the state's Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), commercial insurance and Medicaid, which prevent addicts from getting the assistance they need when they need it.

“We have to act fast, people's lives are on the line,” said Ruth Roberts, Director of Chenango County Community Services. “With other drug addictions, we had some time. Heroin is different. It comes down to timely access to the level of treatment they need.”

George Dermody, Executive Director of the Children's Home in Binghamton discussed a new partnership with the Addiction Center of Broome County that provides local drug treatment programs for adolescents to prevent extended separation from their families and support systems.

“The more we collaborate, the more we work together, the stronger we are,” said Dermody.

Broome County District Attorney Stephen Cornwell reported on his Operation SAFE program, which has placed 70 addicts in out-of-state treatment programs in the past two

months.

“If anyone calls my office and they say they're a heroin addict and want to go to treatment, they go to treatment,” said Cornwell. “I took a lot of grief from other DAs saying, 'Why are you involved in this? This is not the District Attorney's job,' it is, because if people are in treatment and off the streets, they're not committing crimes and they're not dying.”

Panelist Lisa Bailey of Waverly formed Valley Addiction and Drug Education after dealing with her son's addiction to heroin.

“We need help, we are just volunteers helping each other in our community,” said Baily. “We need to provide access to treatment and long term effective treatment options. We need to provide information resources and education. As a community we need to pull together.”

Senator Akshar commended the panel for coming together to discuss this critical common goal and pledged to use their testimony to craft action at the state level to address the issues raised.

“It's clear to me that there are so many people in this community who care,” said Akshar. “I'm eager work with my colleagues on the Task Force to take the information gleaned from today's testimony along with written testimony from the public and produce real, tangible results for the people I represent.”

Public comment on the Heroin Epidemic will be accepted through Akshar's website until April 20th. To submit your comments, please visit [Akshar.NYSenate.Gov](http://Akshar.NYSenate.Gov).