



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## FIGHTING BACK AGAINST NY'S HEROIN EPIDEMIC

PATTY RITCHIE May 23, 2016



Across our state and our region, heroin abuse continues to be a problem that threatens the safety of our communities and destroys lives. Continuing my efforts to fight back against this epidemic, I recently joined with my fellow members of the New York State Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction to release a report that outlines solutions for winning the battle against abuse of these substances. The report is the result of forums held across the state—one of which took place in Watertown—to address this major issue.

In this report, we outlined a four-pronged approach that would stop the growth of the heroin and opioid crisis, as well as support those who are fighting to break free from the deadly grip of these drugs:

***Prevention:*** One of the key findings of the report was a need to focus on raising awareness to better educate the public about the serious risks involved in using heroin and abusing prescription opioids. It also stresses the need to utilize new technological advances to deter the abuse of prescription drugs and prevent addiction. Prevention efforts are crucial—and that's why in recent years, I've worked to secure \$80,000 in special funding to provide students throughout our region with vitally important anti-drug education and counseling programs.

***Treatment:*** The report also focuses on the need for expanded and improved insurance coverage to help ensure people have the support they need to stop using drugs and return to stable and productive lives. The need to expand treatment was one of the major issues identified at my heroin and opioid forum held in Watertown, and as a result, in 2014 legislation I sponsored to expand insurance coverage for treating heroin addiction was signed into law.

***Recovery:*** Providing support through things like safe environments, stable employment and other efforts are identified in the report as ways to help facilitate healthy, successful recoveries from addiction.

***Enforcement:*** When it comes to stopping the spread of illegal substances, law enforcement is key. Included in the report are suggestions for implementing criminal justice reforms that give law enforcement the tools needed to fight back against heroin and opiate prescription medications across the state.

In addition, the Senate also recently approved legislation—based on this report—aimed at stopping the growth of New York’s heroin and opioid crisis, as well as making it easier to help those looking to break free from the deadly grip of these substances. Measures passed include those that seek to better educate the public about the dangers of heroin abuse, enhance access to treatment, facilitate successful recoveries from addiction and give law enforcement the tools to stop the spread of heroin and abuse of opioids.

This work builds on our previous efforts to halt the heroin epidemic. Earlier this year, I advocated alongside my fellow Task Force members for \$166 million to be included in the new state budget for treatment, outpatient and residential services necessary to help those struggling with heroin and opioid abuse. The funding represents a \$25 million increase over the Executive Budget’s original proposal.

To read the New York State Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction’s report, I invite you to [click here](#).