



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Fred Akshar

Akshar Appointed as a Co-Chair of the Joint Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction

[Fred Akshar](#)

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New York State Senate Majority Leader John J. Flanagan today announced the appointment of Senator Fred Akshar (R-C-I-Ref, Colesville) and Senator Chris Jacobs (R-C-I, Buffalo) as two new co-Chairs of the Senate’s bipartisan Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction. Senator Akshar, a former law enforcement official with hands-on experience in fighting drug use and distribution, and Senator Jacobs, a former Erie County clerk whose district has witnessed firsthand the scourge of heroin and opioids, will help lead the continued study of community concerns. The Task Force will again hold forums, meet with experts, and evaluate what further state measures are needed to reduce drug abuse in New York.

Senator Flanagan said, “Our Heroin and Opioid Task Force has done tremendous work over the past three years, and is bolstered by the additions of Senators Akshar and Jacobs. Along with co-Chair Senator George Amedore, Senators Akshar and Jacobs will build on the life-saving work done by this important Task Force since its inception.”

Senator Akshar said, “I’m humbled to have been appointed as a co-Chair of the Senate Heroin Task Force and I’m excited to continue working with my colleagues and with our community stakeholders in the coming year. Last year, the Task Force traveled the state, listened and took action by passing meaningful reforms to expand access to treatment and bolster prevention. We need to build on those successes, ensure that the reforms passed are properly implemented, and identify ways the state is still falling short in providing opportunities for individuals who need

help to get clean and stay clean.”

Senator Jacobs said, “Our state is facing a real epidemic in the form of heroin and opioid addiction. In Erie County alone, confirmed or suspected opioid-related deaths have nearly tripled since 2014. This crisis affects individuals of all socioeconomic backgrounds. I am eager to take on the important work of the Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction to address the issues and challenges facing treatment providers and law enforcement.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 2,754 New Yorkers died of a drug overdose in 2015 – a majority due to heroin and opioids – which was a 20 percent increase from the year before.

In 2016 alone, the Task Force, then led by Senators Robert Ortt, Terrence Murphy, and George Amedore, held nine forums across the state to hear from community leaders, treatment providers, law enforcement personnel, recovering users, and a variety of other citizens from communities afflicted by the heroin and opioid epidemic.

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 led to the Senate’s passage of 27 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: expanding insurance coverage for addiction treatment; enhancing treatment options; empowering professionals to administer emergency assistance to individuals; enhancing data collection and reporting on heroin and opioid overdoses; requiring hospitals to educate individuals about available treatment services; requiring prescriber education; and providing insurance coverage for necessary inpatient services for the diagnosis and treatment of substance use disorder.

The Task Force was also instrumental in securing a \$25 million increase over last year’s Executive Budget proposal to help address the public health crisis caused by the heroin and opioid epidemic, for a total of \$189 million in funding.

Newly elected Senators Pam Helming (R, Canandaigua), Elaine Phillips (R-C, Manhasset), and James Tedisco (R-C-I, Glenville) have also joined the Task Force as

members. Senators Murphy and Ortt, former co-Chairs, will continue to be active members of the Task Force.