



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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SERINO AND MOLINARO LEAD COLLABORATIVE SUMMIT TO COMBAT HEROIN AND OPIOID EPIDEMIC

SUSAN SERINO December 11, 2017

| ISSUE: **HEROIN AND OPIOID EPIDEMIC**



POUGHKEEPSIE, NY— With overdose deaths reaching staggering numbers across the state, and especially in Dutchess County, NYS Senator Sue Serino and Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro today brought together more than thirty local stakeholders to tackle the issue head-on.

“While the state has dedicated hundreds of millions of dollars and put new laws in place to stop the scourge of heroin and opioid abuse, we need to take an ‘all hands on deck’ approach to put an end to the

epidemic,” said Senator Sue Serino. “Here in our community, we feel like we’re checking all the boxes, but the statistics surrounding overdoses in our community are telling us that we are missing something. The question here today is, what is that something? This event is about a true grassroots effort to think outside of the box and identify ways we can come together—as a community—to combat the statistics, save lives and prevent addiction from taking hold.”

County Executive Molinaro said, *"Opioid addiction is the public health crisis of our lifetime. This epidemic has gripped our nation, and no area of our country, including Dutchess County, has been immune from its tragic consequences. Dutchess County has numerous resources to help residents battling addiction, as well as those who love them, face their issues and work toward recovery. We're also breaking through the stigma associated with addiction, making it easier for those struggling with drug issues to find the help they require and deserve."*

Participants at today's event included, health professionals and addiction specialists, school and government officials, members of law enforcement, those who have experienced addiction first-hand and more.

Dr. Kia Newman, Dutchess County's Medical Examiner, put a spotlight on the severity of the crisis when she helped kick-off the event by noting that as of the beginning of November, Dutchess County has seen a staggering 78 overdose-related deaths.

Participant Andrew O'Grady, Executive Director of Mental Health America of Dutchess County, added to that point saying, *“There are far too many people being tended to on the street corners, bathroom floors, behind dumpsters and in people's homes. These people are found not breathing and many of them are not able to be revived with Narcan. The heroin crisis in our community, statewide and nationwide is truly a scourge on our society. No demographic is safe and there are not enough readily available beds to accommodate those that want rehab.”*

The issue of improving the connection between available resources and those in need was key among those discussed at the event. Notably, participants from various sectors also emphasized the need for increased awareness and prevention efforts, and highlighted the importance of reaching community members of all ages, but especially pre-teens. Anthony Eack, founder of Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life, noted that on average, the

individuals in recovery that he works with first reported using drugs between the ages of 11 and 13.

At the state level, as a member of the NYS Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid addiction, Senator Serino helped to secured \$214 million in this year's state budget to fund to prevention, treatment, recovery and education services across the state and helped pass legislation that aims to cut the drugs off at the source by implementing stiffer penalties against dealers. Serino and Molinaro have teamed up to combat the issue frequently, with Serino playing a critical role in securing a significant portion of the funding necessary to establish the County's model Stabilization Center.

At the county level, Molinaro, with the support of the Dutchess County Legislature, will enhance Dutchess County's focus on addressing the opioid epidemic with additional addiction and mental health initiatives for 2018. These resources will be highlighted in Dutchess County's new **"Breaking Through"** initiative – an effort to address the stigma that is too often attached to mental health and addiction issues, serving as one of the barriers to an individual getting the help they need. The effort will include a special public outreach effort with Spark Media Project. In 2018, Dutchess County will be adding to its 24/7 intervention resources, as well as enhancing other mental health and addiction supports including:

- Additional social worker positions for HELPLINE and the Stabilization Center;
- An additional social worker, funded by MidHudson Regional Hospital, who will work with the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT) to assist with emergency room diversions;
- Expansion of the Recovery Coach program, counselors who have successfully overcome their own addiction and can provide motivational coaching, mentoring and recovery planning;

- New Addiction Prevention Coordinator to serve as a single point of contact responsible for tracking efforts, collecting data, coordinating training and working with various stakeholders to ensure an effective and coordinated response to opioid abuse in Dutchess County.

The collaborative event is the first in a series that Serino and Molinaro hope to host in the coming year as they seek innovative, and out-of-the-box solutions to the crisis.