



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Ortt, Local Officials Host Community Forum on Opioid Epidemic

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Tonight, Sen. Rob Ortt (R,C,I,Ref-North Tonawanda) was joined by local officials to discuss what steps the state and local leaders are taking to address the opioid epidemic that has impacted communities across New York. This year, Sen. Ortt and his colleagues allocated record funding in the state budget to combat the heroin and opioid epidemic.

By bringing together locally elected officials, law enforcement, recovery services and local educators, residents were able to get a sense of what each section of the community is doing to address this ongoing epidemic. This forum also gave the leaders of the community the opportunity to meet and discuss any new ideas or improved approaches they may have recently developed.

Senator Rob Ortt said, “While the opioid epidemic that our state is facing has devastated families and crippled communities across the state, Western New York has been hit especially hard by opioid addiction. Although this epidemic is proving difficult to overcome, I am encouraged by the investment our state has made into addressing this disease through record funding and legislation. Preventative measures such as a seven-day prescription limit from doctors, treatment-oriented legislation like 72-hour evaluation for Substance Use Disorder (SUD) care, and new Jail-based SUD recovery programs have combined to help address this epidemic from all angles.”

Senator Chris Jacobs said, “This year the Senate Task Force on Heroin & Opioid Addiction fought for a record level \$247 million to support treatment and recovery while stiffening penalties for drug dealers and giving law enforcement the tools they need to restrict the flow of illegal substances. Forums like the one we held this evening give us insights from healthcare professionals, community service providers and law enforcement that will be very valuable as we develop a legislative agenda and priorities for next year.”

Assemblyman Angelo J. Morinello said, “I was honored to participate in the community forum this evening to help educate local leaders and interested citizens about what is going on with various sectors of the legal community, recovery services and us, as elected representatives, regarding the opioid/heroin epidemic. This epidemic has ravaged our communities by record numbers in record time and we must all pull together in an effort to eliminate this disease. Only when we all work together can progress be made.”

James Voutour, Niagara County Sheriff, said, "Opioid overdoses, both fatal and non-fatal continue to be a crisis in Niagara County. Overdoses are currently on pace to exceed 2017 numbers. The sheriff's office continues to aggressively investigate dealers and bring them to justice. The Niagara County Jail recently received a substantial grant from NY State to provide intense drug counseling within the walls of the jail. This epidemic requires a team solution and I appreciate the efforts of everyone involved."

Daniel Ljiljanich, Niagara Wheatfield CSD Superintendent, said, "As a school district, it is of the utmost importance that we are proactive in our approach to dealing with drug and alcohol addiction. Providing students opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities allows them to take part in positive risk-taking, and helps decrease the prevalence of negative risk-taking."

Laura Kelemen, Niagara County Mental Health Services Director, said, "One of our primary goals in addressing the Opiate crisis is to reduce stigma, educate the community, and remove barriers to treatment. With the support of the NYS Senate and Assembly as well as the Niagara County Legislature, we have facilitated the growth in the number and type of services available to residents, including peer/family services and services to local Jail inmates. Addiction is a treatable medical condition. Individuals and family members do not need to struggle alone. There is help. There is hope."

Rebecca Wydysh, Niagara County Legislator, said, "OASIS, Niagara County's Opioid Task Force, brings together local leaders, department heads, service providers, community members and individuals in recovery in an effort to collaborate and create new initiatives and programs throughout the county. We want to help those already in the grips of addiction to find the immediate help they need, educate the community about substance use and help end the stigma attached to this devastating disease. We still have an opioid epidemic in Niagara County, but the atmosphere in our community is changing, and that is the first step. People are willing to listen, to understand that addiction and overdose CAN happen in their families and to hear our message. There is help. There is hope. Recovery is possible."

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