



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Saving Our Communities From Opioid Addiction

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

In our region, heroin and opioids continue to take the lives of our loved ones, friends and neighbors, while destroying families and communities.

A new report on preventable deaths from the National Safety Council says that Americans are now more likely to die from an opioid overdose than a vehicle crash. This has never before been the case.

We must work hard to keep not only opioids and heroin out of our communities, but we must also ensure that drugs, especially prescription drugs, do not end up in the wrong hands—both those who sell and those who use drugs, and even more importantly, our children.

Each year, I host a number of drug take back events called “Shed the Meds”. I team up with hospitals and law enforcement agencies to give people a place to bring their unwanted, unused or expired prescription drugs—where they will be safely disposed of.

Back in December, I hosted events in Oswego and Jefferson Counties—St. Lawrence County residents were able to bring their drugs to local hospitals and drop them off in special locked kiosks—and during these events, we collected more than 400 pounds of these drugs. We also collected these prescriptions at my annual Senior Health and Wellness Fairs. Over the years, we have collected nearly a ton of these still very dangerous pills.

It is now nice to see New York State following our lead. A new state law, the Drug Take Back Act, just went into effect. It requires drug manufacturers and pharmacies to take back unwanted medications at their facilities and stores. It also requires drug makers to pay for the cost of the take back program, which includes the collection and disposal of the drugs and ensuring pharmacies have drop boxes and pre-paid envelopes for legal consumers.

In addition to keeping these drugs out of the wrong hands, their proper disposal also protects our drinking water and the environment from when they end up flushed down a toilet.

Under the new law, we all must work together and curb drug abuse in our communities. Let us make this a major priority for all of us here in 2019 and beyond.