



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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More Must Be Done to Combat Opioid Crisis

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New York State and the country continue to struggle with a public health crisis related to drugs, in particular, opioid addiction. While the most recent statistics on drug-related overdose deaths may indicate that some progress is being made in the fight against this epidemic, it is clear that our aggressive approach to combat this crisis must continue.

According to a recent report in the New York Times, drug overdose deaths in the U.S. dropped last year for the first time since 1990. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said total overdose deaths declined by around 5-percent and that the drop was

due almost entirely to a dip in deaths from prescription opioid painkillers. Similarly, statistics from the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office showed the number of opioid-related overdose deaths in Erie County dropped to a four-year low last year. There were 194 confirmed or suspected opioid deaths in 2018 compared to 251 in 2017 and 301 in 2016. While these numbers are encouraging, the battle is far from over.

I am pleased to report that I have been asked to serve on a revamped Senate Task Force on Opioid Addiction and look forward to working with my colleagues on this important issue. As a former state trooper and Sheriff of Erie County, I have witnessed the devastating impact that addiction can have on individuals and families. Serving as the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Health, I recognize that a unified effort is needed to address this public health threat.

In the past, I was pleased to support the creation of the Drug Take Back Act, which provided New Yorkers with safe and accessible disposal methods to help prevent addiction, which often starts with misuse of unused medications, whether it belongs to the individual, a friend, a relative, or someone else.

New York State's Compassionate Care Act, which went into effect in January 2016, has also played a role in combating opioid abuse by allowing medical marijuana to be used for the treatment of debilitating diseases, or conditions that cause chronic pain. Last year, the Senate and Assembly passed legislation to allow the use of medical marijuana as an alternative to opioids for the treatment of pain.

As a state, we must do all we can to strengthen prevention, treatment, recovery and education programs. This year's state budget includes record funding to combat heroin and opioid abuse in communities across New York and these new initiatives are part of the latest effort to save lives by putting an end to this public health crisis.

One thing we have learned is that the drug and opioid epidemic knows no age, geographic or socioeconomic boundaries as it devastates individuals and families. We must continue to identify policies and procedures that will increase public awareness, help those struggling with addiction and hold those responsible for the spread of this epidemic accountable.