



Suffolk County Heroin and Opiate Epidemic Advisory Panel-Meeting Minutes 2-7-2020

Meeting Date: February 7, 2020

Location: Hauppauge Legislative Auditorium, William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, NY

Next Meeting Date: May 8, 2020

Members in Attendance:

Suffolk County Legislator Sarah Anker, Chair
Michael Caplan, Suffolk County Medical Examiner
Liz Alexander, Office of Suffolk County Legislator William Spencer
Guy Calla, Office of Suffolk County Legislator Kevin McCaffrey
Karen Klafter, Office of Suffolk County Legislator Tom Donnelly
Colleen McKenna, Office of Suffolk County Sheriff Errol Toulon
Kerri Ann Souto, Office of District Attorney Tim Sini
Inspector Stan Grodski, Office of Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart
Jeffrey Reynolds, Family and Children's Association
Cari Faith Besserman, Suffolk County Division of Mental Health and Hygiene
Mary Silberstein, Suffolk County Communities of Solution
Steve Chassman, LICADD
Julie Lutz, Suffolk County Superintendents' Association
Claudia Friszell, FIST
Pat Policastro, North Shore Youth Council
Robert Woods, North Shore Youth Council
David Cohen, Eastern Long Island Hospital
Pamela Mizzi, Long Island Prevention Resource Center
John Venza, Outreach House
Pat Ferendino, Quality Consortium & Family Service League of Suffolk County
Janine Logan, Nassau/Suffolk Hospital Council
Robert McConville, Selden Fire Department Commissioner

Recorder: Laura Logan, Legislative Aide for Legislator Sarah Anker

I. Welcoming Remarks- Legislator Sarah Anker

II. Pledge

III. Moment of Silence

IV. Panel Member Introductions

V. Updated Statistics – Medical Examiner’s Office & Police Department

Dr. Caplan discussed that every month the Medical Examiner’s Office provides an updated account of the total deaths in which the cause of death was contributed to by opioids, as well as those that contained heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone, and other drugs such as benzodiazepines or cocaine. He noted that there are a significant number of deaths caused by benzodiazepines and cocaine. The office calculates death trends by taking the number of known opioid deaths and percentages of fatal opioid deaths. As of the beginning of February, there were 171 opioid deaths pending from 2019. There has been a 17% decrease from 2018. While the statistics are promising, by no means has the problem been eradicated. But there is hope.

Inspector Grodski explained that the police department statistics are a little rawer than the Medical Examiner’s. As of the beginning of February, there were 27 fatal opioid deaths, 55 Narcan saves, and 87 nonfatal incidents. The 6th precinct remains the epicenter for the crisis, which includes the towns of Coram, Centereach, and Medford. Inspector Grodski also noted that the Centers for Disease Control reported that drug overdoses have decreased nationwide for the first time in three decades. They also reported that there have been fewer overdoses from prescription opioids. This is most likely due to increased education for doctors and pharmacies, changes in the court systems, and more accessibility to Narcan.

Steve Chassman from LICADD reported that alcohol remains the number one drug of choice for those who call into the organization’s hotline. He and other members noted that while opioids remain a high concern, there are other issues and risk factors that bring the panel to the table.

Legislator Anker stated that she would like to add a more inclusive “update” portion to the meeting agendas, as to gather statistics from across panel members.

VI. Discussion

John Venza has been participating in meetings in Albany in response to an increase in out-of-state providers. He reported that there are 45 teens in treatment at Outreach House and that 85% of them had reported to use “lean,” which contains codeine. He noted that most providers do not know how to ask the right questions when speaking to adolescents about their drug use, and that providers have to get ahead of the curve.

The panel discussed the availability of prevention funding. Members discussed the Drug-Free Communities and Partnership For Success grants through the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (NYS OASAS). It was also noted that grants are available through Suffolk County. LICADD used grant money for its coaches training program, which has trained 148 coaches so far in the county.

It was discussed that there has been a downward trend in total ER visits because of the opening of the DASH Center. Panel members were encouraged to tour the center.

Another topic of discussion included the NYS marijuana legislation. This legislation remains an ongoing concern due to the lack of a real-time test to measure THC in the body. This poses a particular concern for law enforcement because they cannot perform a quantitative analysis of the marijuana that is seized from an arrest. It was suggested that a meeting be held between the Crime Lab and the District Attorney's Office to find a possible solution to this. The panel was in agreement that the state is not prepared for the legalization of marijuana. It was again discussed that all those on the frontlines of this crisis stay ahead of the curve and, in particular, look at young people and their substance use histories to figure out when adolescents begin using marijuana and find the progression of their substance use. It has been seen that cannabis use can cause mental health disorders in young people, including schizophrenia and psychosis. The panel anticipates that the state will push hard for the legislation to be passed, using the argument that there is a huge incentive for revenue that can fill huge budget holes. The panel agreed that tax monies must be set in stone to go towards prevention and treatment for substance use disorders.

VII. 2020 Priorities and Initiatives

Legislator Anker provided the panel with a draft letter addressed to the MTA and LIRR asking them to provide Narcan on trains, train conductors to recognize overdoses and administer Narcan, and work with LICADD and the panel to put a public service announcement on station monitors. Two PSA ideas included "Hey, Charlie" and the DASH Center promotional video. The panel discussed that the excuse that "no one has died on the train" is an issue of semantics and technicalities. The panel also asked that the letter be modified to include any and all educational materials for use on trains and in train stations. The panel also considered formulating a PSA to run on news channels such as News 12. The PSA must make people feel a certain way, which could be achieved by a balance of more shocking content like the "Hey, Charlie" video, and more informational content like the DASH video. It was agreed that regardless, the PSA must be engaging in order to keep the public's attention. It was asked that the 30-second version of the "Hey, Charlie" video be sent to panel members for distribution on social media sites.

The panel discussed the formation of the youth committee which will go before the full Legislature at the February 11th General Meeting. The panel will include 8 members between the ages of 16 and 25, and will actively collaborate with the Heroin and Opiate Epidemic Advisory Panel. One of the representatives will be well-versed in social media outreach and marketing. Two of the members will be representatives of drug advocacy organizations. The legislation will be written to make sure membership requirements are fluid, in order to accommodate youth in recovery, those going off to college, etc. The membership makeup of the committee will allow for multiple perspectives. The committee will encompass all areas of addiction that impact youth.

Another topic of discussion was the mandate for schools to include substance use as part of health education. There are mental health modules that the state has developed for school districts to use as part of their curriculums. BOCES helps districts understand what's expected of them and what resources are available to them. Resources range by grade of the students. There

are also resources from Suffolk County that can be used to supplement these modules. It was noted that there is a disturbing trend of schools not renewing their contracts for the BOCES counselors. This has proven to be a funding issue and the panel can advocate to the state officials, school boards, Superintendents' Association, etc.

There is a need for a recovery high school, which is geared towards high school students in some level of sustained recovery. This kind of facility will help these students keep up with their recovery. John Venza reported that there will be a Long Island-wide recovery high school funded through Western Suffolk BOCES SOAR money. He also reported that the Outreach House women's facility is now open with 25 beds for females, ages 18 and above. The organization will be breaking ground on other facilities this year.

VIII. Public Comment Period

Margaret Brophy of Westhampton Beach addressed the importance of maintaining access to prescription medications for chronic pain patients.

IX. Adjournment