

**OPIOID ADDICTION COMMITTEE
MINUTES
THURSDAY, AUGUST 19, 2021
4:15 P.M.**

PRESENT: Janet Sutherland, Chairwoman
Kevin W. Hines, Darcie Miller

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Thomas Faggione, Legislator
Peter Tuohy, Legislator
John Vero, Legislator
Peter Tuohy, Legislator
Tammy Rhein, Director of Chemical and Dependency Services
Betsy Abraham, Legislative Counsel
Annette Kahrs, President, Tri-County Community Partnership,
Hope Not Handcuffs Program
Paul Rickard, President, Police Chiefs' Association of Orange County
Mike and Kim Haney, Guest Speakers

Ms. Sutherland called the meeting to order at 4:15 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislators Lujan and Sassi, who were absent.

Ms. Miller provided an update on the Opioid crisis (see original minutes). She highlighted that there has been an increase in deaths due to addiction and opioid overdoses from 2019 to 2020 and there have been in excess of 90,000 deaths across the country. Fentanyl is the substance that is really taking so many lives. There are fentanyl strips to test substances but there has been controversy. It is a preventative strategy and is supported by the Federal and State Government. Ms. Miller shared that there are Narcan cabinets and coalitions across the county along with Tammy Rhein, will help determine where to put these Narcan cabinets.

Ms. Sutherland asked about the location of the Narcan cabinets and how people are going to have access to them.

Ms. Miller stated that it was her understanding that it would be on the street so people will have access to them. They are working on locations.

Ms. Sutherland further asked how will people know how to administer the Narcan.

Ms. Miller explained that there are instructions and people should really take the course to administer it but there are not many risks. It is better to use it than not.

Ms. Sutherland stated that they wanted to bring to light information on a substance called "Kratom." Kratom is a tropical plant called *Mitragyna speciosa* and is sold in stores and online. Some people will say that it helps them with opioid addiction and is advertised to help to lessen symptoms of opioid withdrawal and to help deal with addiction. It is abused and is a terrible substance which is out there for anybody to purchase. She suggested to the committee that they should take action and move forward to try and regulate Kratom.

Ms. Kahrs provided a brief update on "HOPE not HANDCUFFS." They are now located at 67 Police Departments who are part of the program. They recently launched into a sixth county which is Sullivan County. They document everything that has been happening with the program with interviews through police, the Angels, participants, and the program staff. Since December they placed 124 people into treatment and 80% of their calls are through their phone line which comes in via billboard, an Angel, or a police referral. They spend a lot of time training police on how to engage the community with the program which is a crime prevention tool. They placed eleven people in treatment this week and since July they took 167 calls and so far for the month of August they took 123 calls. The work they have been doing with "HOPE not HANDCUFFS" has been very busy. She addressed Kratom and stated that her exposure to Kratom started about five years ago when there was a police officer who spoke about street drugs. There was not much mention of it until early this summer when "HOPE not HANDCUFFS" received two phone calls from Rockland County, one in Ramapo Police Department and one in Haverstraw Police Department, where people walked in presenting with symptoms of psychosis and they were using the drug Kratom. Neither one of those cases were able to be placed because the treatment facilities at the time were not recognizing that the drug alone but when presented with another drug, treatment is available. She had personal experience with it in her own family and it is not good. She has a close, personal working relationship with a woman who lost her niece two years ago to Kratom. There were high levels of Kratom in her niece's toxicology report. Kratom is available in gas stations and delicatessens and you can just walk in and get it. She spends a lot of time talking with police and asked the police if they heard of it. Yesterday, in one of the police departments no one knew or heard of Kratom but today in Blooming Grove two hands were raised when asked if they knew what Kratom was. When Kratom is used on a lower level it gives a euphoric affect and can last for five to six hours but when used in higher doses, it provides a sedative affect, similar to morphine or heroin.

Chief Rickard mentioned that from the Police Department perspective this substance does not require a prescription and currently in New York it is unregulated. New Jersey recently imposed a statewide regulation on the sale of Kratom. Anyone can go into a convenient store in their town or village and get Kratom and it can be purchased in unlimited amounts and that causes concern, especially with people under the age of 21. It has a similar affect to heroin, an opioid at higher levels. He was hopeful that at some point the FDA will try to regulate it but the FDA is slow. They have seen overdoses where Kratom is in their system but so is heroin. He was not sure how far they can go with this but at least they can restrict it to people under the age of 21. That is the scary part, to be 16 or 17 years old and going to the gas station in town to buy Kratom and use it with no regulations.

Ms. Sutherland stated that she did some research and in Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, and New York you have to be 18 to purchase Kratom. In Tennessee you have to be 21. It is illegal in Arkansas, Alabama, Indiana, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin and in Mississippi they are regulating by County.

Chief Rickard interjected and noted that there is no enforcement of that. It is not like alcohol where there is a State Liquor Authority. It is not something that the police can regulate because it is a civil issue.

Ms. Sutherland stated that when she has been in gas stations she has seen Kratom in liquid form or in capsule form. On her way back from Virginia she stopped in a gas station in Pennsylvania and there was a huge display with a variety of edibles and flavored drinks and capsules. In California, it cannot be purchased in San Diego and Oceanside and in Colorado there are two towns that have banned Kratom.

Mr. Hines asked if the legal age to purchase in New York is 18 and Chief Rickard responded that is correct.

Mr. Hines added that he noticed it being sold in convenient stores. He asked if it is something that would be picked up by a drug officer if someone was to be pulled over in a vehicle.

Chief Rickard responded that he was not sure how it would show but it is not an illegal substance and there is no penalty.

Mr. Hines noted that there is an impairment affect.

Ms. Miller added that the FDA put some warnings on it but nothing strong enough to make big changes. She looked at the OASIS website to see what their position was on this substance and if they would be pushing it forward, she was disappointed. Ms. Miller referred to Ms. Rhein to see if there was further discussion in any meetings as to whether they plan to increase regulation.

Ms. Rhein stated that they have not had any recent conversation about regulating it. Like Chief Rickard mentioned, it is not a regulated drug but it is a drug of concern. With the legalization of marijuana, it complicates things.

Mike and Kim Haney shared their personal story how Kratom and opioids impacted their family.

Ms. Miller stated that the Department of Mental Health and the Orange County Legislature will continue to research and continue to advocate to try and gain support about the negative impacts of Kratom. They are all for medically assisted treatment, however, Kratom is not the answer.

Mr. Brescia thanked Mike and Kim Haney for sharing their story and he was sure it was hard to tell. They need to hear more stories from people to help educate them and in turn educate the public. That is the goal of this committee.

Ms. Miller shared that the Department of Mental Health has a fully executed contract with "HOPE not HANDCUFFS" to help them with funding for positions. There was a Black Poster Project in Monroe that was sponsored by "HOPE not HANDCUFFS."

Mr. Tuohy stated that he attended the event and there were about 350 to 400 who passed through. People are still talking about it. It was very moving.

Mr. Vero mentioned that he has two sons in their twenties and could not imagine what the Haney family went through. Before today he never heard of Kratom. He planned to talk to his boys about it to see if they heard of it and are aware of it. He stops at the convenient store in Chester twice a week and all those products are right there by the checkout area, accessible, enticing and too available.

Chief Rickard mentioned the little bottles of 5 Hour Energy and people take the shot for a boost of energy but when he saw that Kratom was in liquid form, it was a bit of a shock.

Ms. Miller announced that there was an Overdose Awareness event scheduled for August 31st. New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) is doing a virtual event and there will be events in the Walden and Montgomery areas this year.

On the motion of Mr. Hines, seconded by Ms. Sutherland, the meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.