

**OPIOID ADDICTION COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2018  
2:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Rob Sassi, Chairman,  
Kevin W. Hines, Joel Sierra, Janet Sutherland, Darcie Miller

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman  
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader  
Thomas Faggione, Legislator  
James M. Kulisek, Legislator  
Kevindaryan Lujan, Legislator  
Kathy A. Stegenga, Legislator  
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel  
Steven M. Neuhaus, County Executive  
Mary Pat Smith, Assistant to the County Executive  
David M. Hoovler, District Attorney  
Carl E. DuBois, Sheriff  
Kenneth T. Jones, Undersheriff  
Paul Arteta, Deputy Sheriff/Captain  
Brendan Casey, Commissioner of Emergency Services  
David Church, AICP, Commissioner of Planning

Mr. Sassi called the meeting to order at 2:39 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. All committee members were present with the exception of Joel Sierra who was absent.

Mr. Sassi thanked everyone in attendance for attending the first Opioid Addiction Committee meeting. He announced that this was not a Legislative Statutory Committee. The mission is to create a greater understanding of the depth and scope of the opioid epidemic that we are all aware of. He provided some background as to how they got to where they are. He explained that it started because as an educator for 32 years, to date, he has seen ten former students that sat in front of him in school, pass away. It was about six years ago, a Valley Central student, a scholar athlete, died. When he asked what happened, he was told, it was heroin. He was stunned. He is so baffled by this and really bothered by this. When he ran for Legislator last year, he started meeting with parents and different people and really got involved. Since he was elected, he met with Commissioner Miller, District Attorney Hoovler, Sheriff DuBois, local police chiefs, community coalition, state officials, hospitals, many, many other agencies, along with addicts and their families. His discoveries can be summed up in the following statement: This epidemic knows no age, race, sex, social status or political affiliation. How deep it is and how sad it is, after speaking with the District Attorney, they are two years away from its peak. Overdose is the leading cause of injury related deaths in the United States. Most important is how helpless people, including addicts, families and loved ones are, when it comes to finding help. Back during his high school days, an addict was someone in a back alley in some city some place, not here. This is not the case anymore. There are many people and organizations out there doing wonderful things to help fight this epidemic but are overloaded and underfunded. Lastly, addiction is not a choice, it is a

disease. This epidemic is his number one goal which will include a greater awareness to the scope and depth of the epidemic itself, soliciting advice from a variety of experts, including, Darcie Miller, David Hoovler, Sheriff DuBois and many more. If they can collectively save one life, it is worth it.

Mr. Sassi asked everyone to introduce themselves and began with Legislator Hines.

Mr. Hines stated that he is in his 9<sup>th</sup> year as a Legislator. He has seen a lot of this in his capacity as a fireman and they discuss this at the Police Advisory Board. He would like to learn more about opioid addiction, so he can help people spread the word because he was not educated enough on this.

County Executive Neuhaus introduced himself and stated that his office, the District Attorney and the Sheriff's Office have been working on this for the last four or five years, they call it the three-prong approach on fighting this: one is enforcement, one is education, one is treatment. He would like to see results out of this committee. He has been to forums where parents say there are no beds available at treatment centers, or they should give away Narcan for free. He would love to talk about the process, how to get help, getting treatment rather than incarceration.

Ms. Sutherland stated she is a newly elected Legislator and a school social worker. Her students have siblings that are affected by this and they have parents that are affected by this and there are co-workers that are affected by this. Recently they had a student who gave the commencement address at the Orange Ulster BOCES graduation and unfortunately passed away before school started. It is out there, it is affecting everybody. She added that there was not a door that she knocked on while she was campaigning last summer that somebody did not say; "You need to do something, you need to promise us to do something about this opioid epidemic." She is looking forward to being on this committee and trying to help in any way she can.

Mr. Sassi stated that he wanted to get more informed and he finds that many people are not informed so he wants to learn and see what they can do. He plans to have various speakers come in, but he wanted to first start with Commissioner Miller who was going to make a presentation today. He advised that there were various hands out and plenty more if anyone wanted some. (on file with Clerk)

Ms. Miller agreed with everything that has been stated so far, including the fact that they have not reached the peak of this yet. They have been aware of the issue in the county for several years now. It began in 2013 when they had 50 deaths due to opioids and it hit the radar across the country. One in ten people have an addiction issue and they are national numbers. Typically, nine out of ten do not seek treatment. Without treatment success stories are very low and can result in death. Addiction is a chronic disease that impacts the brain pathways therefore making it a chronic disease. She described the pain scale with the happy face to the sad face and the health professionals were responsible and held liable for responding to pain levels. In response to that, more and more pain medications, opioids, began to be prescribed and with that, people became addicted. Then when you take that addicting drug away, people sometimes resort to that \$5 bag of heroin on the street. Ms. Miller referred to the Dr. Waller Report and the different dopamine levels the brain experiences and how the drug enhances the dopamine level. Eventually you get to the point where you need the drug to keep up the dopamine level and you become drug-sick and need

the drug just to get through the day, that is when it is an addiction and you have no choice. When you stop taking the substance, that dopamine level drops off and you level is very low where you cannot get out of bed. That is where medicated assisted treatment comes in. Trying to make it on your own, going to self-help groups, there is 8% chance of recovery. With medication assisted treatment that affects the dopamine levels there is a 75% chance of recovery. They do not have that practice available because it has not become a gold standard of treatment. She continued to explain the frustration when someone who had an overdose goes to the hospital, they get the Narcan, they are monitored for a few hours, by then the some of the opioid may have kicked, the Narcan has worn off and back on the street you go, and you are at risk of overdosing immediately after receiving Narcan. Methadone is a common option and was the preferred form of treatment, which is a full opioid. It is administered based on the level of use. You do not want to rush off the medication because it can be a year, maybe five years because it is a chronic disease. She explained that they have had many forums with herself, the Sheriff and the District Attorney's office. She urged everyone to read the Waller Report because it will give everyone a good understanding where they are at, where the gaps in service are and why they have the current work groups that they have in place in the county and what each group is tasked with. They are using that as their blueprint around substance abuse in Orange County. The gap that they have is the single plan of access to care. They do not want to go to community forums and hear people say, "they did not know how to get help" or "We need more beds." You would think there is not one available slot in the county for service since there were so many problems.

Mr. Sassi commented that when they had a vigil a set of parents came forward and said, "they did not know where to turn" and that was a concern that they were not doing a good job getting the word out.

Ms. Miller stated that the number to call is the Mental Health Association which provides service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There will be signs throughout communities.

Mr. Sassi asked if they can get the information from the signs on the county website. He mentioned that when you go to Erie County website all the contact information is right there.

Mr. Neuhaus pointed out that Erie County loses about 12 people per week.

Mr. Hoovler pointed out that the Erie County is also funding at a large level. This was good conversation with very good intentions but unless someone is going to put money into this, why bother have the conversation.

Mr. Sassi commented that was why they were all here. The Legislature holds the pen and the purse. It is like the saying goes, "put up or shut up."

Ms. Miller stated they need treatment on demand. It will cost more money as they move forward. Come January they will work with 911 Center and they will link someone to service. There are peers across the county to help but they need to coordinate them to be available when they need them, where they need them. They need someone in the emergency room so when someone overdoses, they can seek treatment before they leave the emergency room.

Mr. Sassi asked when the most critical moment is for an addict when they overdose without them seeking help.

Ms. Miller explained that it takes effect right way because once the Narcan is administered, that sends them into immediate withdrawal.

Mr. Sassi discussed withdrawal in more detail and stated that he spoke with the District Attorney about the heroin that was around back in the 1970's and 1980's, the potency of it was about 15% and today it is close to 80% and above. It is as cheap as \$3.00 to \$5.00 on the street. He said for everyone to look at the Erie County website because there are testimonials on there and the site links you to statistics, trouble signs, what to look for.

There was discussion on Narcan and its availability. Training is offered by the county every month. They are asked to restrict their kits to one per department instead of giving them out to everyone because they are running low.

Captain Arteta commented that something he hears besides the need for more Narcan, is RMA, refuse medical attention. To keep giving people Narcan is fixing us to be prepared for something that may never happen, it does not fix the problem.

Mr. Hoovler stated that they need to target the people that are at most risk. Unless you do a targeted prevention package to the people at risk. The battle is going to get worse because the legalization of marijuana is going to make this worse.

Mr. Sassi mentioned that this cannot be an assembly once a year for kids, this needs to be a constant reminder.

County Executive Neuhaus stated that there has been some resistance with this type of education in local schools.

Ms. Miller pointed out that truancy is a big sign and an indicator.

Mr. Hoovler stated that they have one of the best truancy programs in the state and he will work with school districts. He was only able to get about three or four schools to participate because they do not want their real numbers to be known.

Mr. Sassi concluded the meeting by stating the goal is to do something and try to put together all the great things that people are already doing and get some information out there and, on the county website is a good start.

The meeting adjourned at 3:14 p.m.

