

NEWS RELEASE

County of Warren, New Jersey
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Warren County Looks to Form Heroin and Opioid Addiction Task Force

(WHITE TWP., NJ – December 14, 2016) – The Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders is working to establish a Heroin and Opioid Addiction Awareness Task Force to combat the abuse epidemic with attention, prevention and treatment.

After hearing a presentation from Douglas Steinhardt, a Phillipsburg attorney, former mayor of Lopatcong and civic leader, the freeholders voted to establish an exploratory committee aimed at forming the task force. Freeholder Director Jason Sarnoski plans to be liaison to the effort, and his board colleagues, Freeholders Richard D. Gardner and Edward J. Smith, joined in unanimously supporting the move.

"It's a tragedy, and if we don't grapple with it now, it's only going to get worse," Steinhardt said of the abuse problem.

"Prescription opioid and heroin abuse aren't topics we can quietly discuss in a corner, anymore. We have to address them openly and directly," Steinhardt told the freeholders. Noting that law enforcement alone is not the answer, he added, "What I am proposing is that we commit some of our time and community resources to being proactive; to fight our own war on drugs, but through awareness, prevention, and treatment."



Warren County officials listen as Douglas Steinhardt outlines a proposal to form a county Heroin and Opioid Addiction Awareness Task Force, before the freeholders unanimously endorsed the idea. Pictured left to right at the dais are: county Engineer William Gleba, Treasurer Daniel Olshefsky, Counsel Joseph J. Bell, Freeholder Richard D. Gardner, Freeholder Director Jason J. Sarnoski, and Freeholder Edward J. Smith.

"It certainly something that's affecting our country and our county," Sarnoski remarked. "We need to attack it and be the leaders ... and put our county resources to use," he added.

Sarnoski said the County will make information available through its website, www.co.warren.nj.us, social media, and other channels to let people know how they can get involved in the effort.

Steinhardt said the task force should include students, parents, teachers, business leaders, healthcare representatives, media and public relations specialists, law enforcement officers, religious and fraternal organizations, substance abuse counsellors and educators, and other interested community members. The task force would work in subcommittees focused on prevention and treatment, media awareness, policies and planning, and funding, and present recommendations to the freeholder board for review and final consideration.

The freeholders will look into structuring the task force as an ad hoc group – similar to the way county economic development efforts were restarted in 2011 through an advisory board – with the aim of convening the group next month and delivering recommendations within six to eight months. Representatives of the Warren County Department of Human Services and other county offices will be involved, the freeholders said, in order to build on efforts that already are underway.

Sarnoski noted that the heroin and opioid abuse rate is “skyrocketing” nationally, and the rate is 2.5 times higher in New Jersey. “We have such a tragic loss of young people,” Freeholder Gardner said, but even “one is too many.”

Freeholder Smith said drug abuse has long been a problem, but the deadly nature of heroin and opioids makes it even worse. “A person can make one wrong turn, and then the impacts are for life,” Smith said.

People wishing to participate in the task force are asked to visit the Volunteer Opportunities page on the Warren County website at www.co.warren.nj.us/personnel/VolunteerOpportunities.html and click to download the Volunteer Application, fill it out and return it to the address listed on the application.

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