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Statewide Coalition and Elected Officials Held Press Conference, Call on NYS Leadership to Pass and Fully Fund the Bill for Lifesaving Medication-Assisted Treatment in Prisons and Jails

With Record-High Overdose Rates Across the State, and High Fatal Overdose Risk for People Leaving Incarceration, Providing Methadone and Buprenorphine in Jails and Prisons Will Save Lives

Albany, NY: Recovery advocates, family members who have lost loved ones to overdose, people who have a history of drug use, drug policy activists, leadership of treatment trade groups, and elected officials held a press conference outside the Senate Chambers to call on the state to urgently pass and fully fund A833/S2161--the bill to establish medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in all New York State jails and prisons.

Speakers highlighted that this bill is a civil rights and human rights issue as people in jails and prisons across the state are being forced to inhumanely withdrawal, often without medical care, often in solitary confinement, and in some cases leading to death. Speakers expressed frustration that in an unrelenting crisis, the Governor proposed allocating a mere \$3.75 million to finance 50 county jails-based MAT programs. This meager expenditure is another illustration of the Governor's legacy of underfunding resources and programs that have significantly decreased overdose deaths in other states which forces counties to bear the financial burden of implementing lifesaving treatment in jails.

"More than 75% of incarcerated individuals in New York State have a diagnosed substance use disorder, yet just a few state prisons offer a comprehensive medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program," said **Assemblymember and Bill Sponsor Linda B. Rosenthal**. "Our state prisons and local jails provide medication to individuals with other medical disorders. To ignore the needs of those with substance use disorders, especially at a time when overdose rates are skyrocketing, is simply inhumane. My legislation would right this wrong and require all state prisons and local jails to make all FDA-approved forms of MAT available to those who need them."

"Every person deserves to be treated in a humane manner, whether they are incarcerated or not," said **Senator and Bill Sponsor Jamaal Bailey**. "New Yorkers that are incarcerated should have access to adequate medical treatment- especially in such a time when we are suffering through an opioid crisis. It is unfortunate that instead of rehabilitating those that suffer from drug abuse, in New York's prisons, individuals have been allowed to suffer on their own, often times leading to their death. This is why I am proud to support the Medication Assisted Treatment bill, and hope to see it come to fruition."

"Prison and jail inmates are at high risk for illnesses related to poverty, addiction, or mental illness, and we have a constitutional obligation to provide health care to people in our custody," said **Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard N. Gottfried**. "Medication-assisted treatment is the professional standard of care on the outside and should be equally accessible

within prisons and jails. We should also expand the very successful 2009 law giving the Health Department oversight of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C services in prisons and jails to include substance use disorder.”

“At the Albany County jail we’ve implemented this program because we know it will reduce the rates of overdose among people recently released, improve people’s ability to stay in treatment and live the lives they want, and will address the cycle of arrest and incarceration that many people with opioid use disorder face,” said **Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple**. “It took me a while to get on board with this, but we’re already seeing early success with our program. I wholeheartedly support the expansion of these efforts and dedication of resources being asked of our state leaders. I also encourage my fellow law enforcement leaders to get behind this.”

“Politicians have long ignored overdose deaths in black communities like mine. Despite the rhetoric of a kinder, gentler drug war as the overdose crisis spreads into white, rural and suburban communities, these same politicians still have not enacted basic, life-saving interventions. I have met many of these white families, and they feel just as stigmatized, ignored and angry, as my community,” said **Will Robertson, Leader at VOCAL-NY**. “If the blue wave that hit New York State does not take action to end our state’s overdose crisis, it will mean nothing to any of these families, white, black or Latino.”

“Throughout New York State, we have a critical opportunity to help fight the opioid epidemic by establishing comprehensive addiction-treatment programs within correctional facilities that include all three FDA-approved medications to treat opioid use disorder,” said **Allegra Schorr, President of the Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State (COMPA)**. “What’s more, we need to provide connections to effective services and treatment upon reentry into the community. Rhode Island and Connecticut have demonstrated the effectiveness of these life-saving programs. New Yorkers deserve a similar chance.”

“I am a person that was arrested for just having a possession of a needle and it wasn’t even on me it was in a car however I was sent to the county jail while I was 8 months pregnant and ended up having a premature birth with my daughter because I was detoxing and didn’t have methadone,” said **Stephanie Member of Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice**. “I didn’t have access to the methadone from the program that I was attending for a year! As a result of this my daughter was in the NICU for two weeks which was very terrifying and traumatic. If I was able to have this treatment while I was incarcerated at the county jail things may have been different. This may not help me today but I’m sure that it would help many people that are and will be in the same situation that I have been through and I hope that they don’t have to suffer the same traumatic and terrifying situation.”

“At Friends of Recovery-New York (FOR-NY), we hear time and time again stories of people in the NYS Justice System who did not receive medication assisted treatment (MAT), which is evidence-based,” said **Interim Executive Director, Allison Weingarten**, adding, “This lack of treatment and connection to treatment or recovery support services leaving a correctional facility tragically often leads to overdose and death. MAT is shown to reduce cravings for opioids and is a proven pathway to addiction recovery, which is why FOR-NY strongly supports this legislation making MAT available in all jails and prisons throughout New York State.”

“A comprehensive range of patient-centered prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services should be made available to all residents of New York’s prisons and jails who suffer from the disease of addiction,” said **John Coppola, Executive Director of New York**

Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers. “While providing all available treatment options to people in prison - we also need to ensure a smooth transition when they return home which includes making sure they maintain easy access to the medications they are taking.”

“The criminalization of substance use has pushed people in need of care into jails and prisons who are not equipped to provide effective medical care. Lack of sustained state resources, medical bias and misinformation surrounding medication-assisted treatment have created a massive treatment gap in New York’s jails and prisons,” **said Dionna King of the Drug Policy Alliance.** “The funding allocated through the 2019-20 budget will not adequately address the significant treatment need in resource-strained counties struggling to provide care to people who cycle in and out of jail. New York state leaders must move beyond rhetoric, ending the overdose crisis requires a commitment to providing care to everyone.”

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