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Governor Christie Signs Executive Order Declaring Opioid Drug Abuse a Public Health Crisis

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

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Trenton, NJ - Intensifying his Administration's commitment in the fight against substance abuse, Governor Chris Christie today signed Executive Order 219 declaring the opioid epidemic a public health crisis in New Jersey. The action requires the marshalling of all appropriate resources to combat its harmful effects on state citizens.

"We must take aggressive action to get this insidious crisis under control so I am calling together all resources of state government in order to save lives," said Governor Christie. "The human cost of this epidemic is incalculable, impacting every part of life in New Jersey, affecting our education system, our health care system, public safety and the financial security of every person it touches."

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, an American dies every 19 minutes from an opioid or heroin overdose. New Jersey's drug overdose death rate increased by almost 22 percent between 2014 and 2015. There was a 30 percent increase in heroin deaths over the previous year and triple the number of deaths caused by the synthetic opioid fentanyl. Additionally, the CDC reports that in 2012, health care providers wrote 259 million prescriptions for opioid pain medication, enough for every adult in the United States to have a bottle of pills.

The new Executive Order creates the Governor's Task Force on Drug Abuse Control, to be headed by Charlie McKenna, Executive Director of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority, which will be charged with developing and executing a comprehensive, coordinated strategy to combat the drug-abuse epidemic by working with all areas of state government, in addition to local, federal, and private entities, as well as the Facing Addiction Task Force.

The Drug Abuse Task Force will consist of eight members, including the Attorney General and the Commissioners of Health, Human Services, Corrections, Education, Children and Families, and Banking and Insurance.

The Task Force will review current statutes and regulations that present barriers to individuals suffering from addiction to receiving treatment and make recommendations to rescind or amend any such statutes or regulations to remove those barriers. The panel is authorized to call upon any department, office, division, or agency of this state to supply it with information, personnel, or other assistance available as the Task Force deems necessary to discharge its duties. The Task Force may consult with experts or other knowledgeable individuals in the public or private sector on any aspect of its mission.

The Executive Order also directs Attorney General Chris Porrino to take all necessary steps to limit the initial prescription of opioids for acute pain and establish standards such that additional quantities may only be prescribed after further consultation with the patient.

The Order further directs Department of Children and Families Commissioner Allison Blake to ensure residential substance abuse disease treatment facilities and similar facilities utilize their existing spaces effectively, including ensuring that 18 and 19-year-olds with substance abuse problems are able to take advantage of any vacancies in existing facilities wherever appropriate.

In addition, the Governor is directing Acting Education Commissioner Kimberley Harrington to develop a new, comprehensive grade-specific curriculum to educate children about the dangers of substance abuse.

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"Opioid drug abuse is one of the most challenging issues facing us not only as Americans but as New Jerseyans," said Governor Christie. "The crisis is pervasive – impacting our families, friends, neighbors and coworkers. The steps I am taking today through this Executive Order recognize the severity of the crisis and pull together the efforts of all state government agencies."

A copy of the Executive Order is attached.

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