



OPIOID EPIDEMIC INITIATIVE

“Hope” for Rockland

In the United States, approximately 130 people die **every day** from opioid-related drug overdoses ¹ which results in a staggering figure of over 47,000 deaths annually due to this crisis facing our Nation. The law enforcement community had been sounding the alarm on this unprecedented epidemic for many years and finally, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a Public Health Emergency to Address the National Opioid Crisis in 2017.

All of us either know someone or have had one of our family members directly impacted by this epidemic. Here in Rockland County, we had thirty-three (33) opioid related overdose deaths in 2018 and have lost fifteen (15) of our residents so far in 2019.² These tragic figures would be much greater if it were not for the number of lives saved by the administration of Narcan by our emergency responders. This year alone, first responders have saved thirty (30) lives in Rockland who would have otherwise been lost due to an opioid related overdose.³

That is why we have gathered here today to announce Judge Walsh’s initiative for his District Attorney’s office called: “Hope” for Rockland.

- **Helping but firm hand**
- **Offer alternatives to incarceration**
- **Proactive law enforcement measures**
- **Education**

1. **Helping but Firm Hand** – Judge Walsh understands that in his role as the next District Attorney that he will be responsible for prosecuting those who break our laws. However, the ultimate goal of the Rockland County District Attorney’s office is to provide a safe community for all of us to raise our families. In dealing with the opioid crisis that means we have to come to terms with the fact that we will not be able to arrest our way out of this epidemic. Therefore, Judge Walsh’s initiative will have a multifaceted approach to

1. <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/sites/default/files/2018-01/opioids-infographic/pdf>
2. Source: Rockland County Narcotics Task Force
3. Id.

dealing with this problem that has plagued our communities. We will need to make sure that our community extends a helping hand to those who have fallen victim to this highly addictive narcotic, yet still be willing to place repeat offenders in jail until they are willing to accept the paths offered to them for recovery. Therefore, our plan of focusing on prevention and rehabilitation utilizing the enforcement portion of our office is the balanced approach to take when battling this epidemic here in Rockland County.

2. **Offering Alternatives to Incarceration** – In addressing the opioid epidemic many studies have been done to gather data on how communities should be dealing with this problem. National research has shown that up to 80 percent of people imprisoned for property or drug crimes will recidivate within two years and up to 95 percent will resort back to substance abuse.⁴ A 15 year study by the National Drug Court Institute concluded that an effective drug court program teamed with treatment is six times more likely to keep individuals in treatment than voluntary treatment programs.⁵ Judge Walsh plans on expanding the Drug Court program which have been proven to be far more effective in reducing crime and promoting recover than incarceration has.

In addition, Judge Walsh’s office pledges to partner with: Hope not Handcuffs Hudson Valley. This is an initiative that is aimed at bringing the law enforcement community and treatment organizations together in an effort to find treatment options for individuals seeking help for addiction. Judge Walsh was honored to have spoken at the first training program held at Rockland Community College on April 29th and will work to help bring this program to all our local police departments in Rockland County. Chief O’Shea and the Piermont Police Department have already embraced this initiative and have received overwhelming support from the community. You can learn more about this program by going to their website: <https://www.familiesagainstnarcotics.org/hopenothandcuffs>.

Judge Walsh also promises to keep and enhance some of the alternative to incarceration programs already in effect and utilized by the Rockland County District Attorney’s office:

- Felony and Misdemeanor Drug Court;
- Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison (DTAP);
- Veteran Alternative to Incarceration (VATI);
- Underage Drinking/Marijuana Diversion program (UDDP);
- Misdemeanor Intervention Program (MIP);
- Mental Health Alternative to Incarceration (MHATI); and

4. Police Executive Research Forum. *The Unprecedented Opioid Epidemic: as overdoses become a leading cause of death, police, sheriffs, and health agencies must step up their response.* (2017): 5-6

5. Id.

- Alternative to Incarceration for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDATI).

3. **Proactive Law Enforcement Measures** - Judge Walsh's office will proactively go after and vigorously prosecute the drug dealers that are profiting from the opioid epidemic. As District Attorney, Judge Walsh will work with local police departments to formulate an Overdose Response Team ("ORT") that will focus on identifying the drug dealer responsible for causing the overdose. All deaths in Rockland County that are a result of an overdose will be treated as a homicide. We will prosecute these cases by any means available to us under the law. That includes but not limited to NYS Penal Law charges of Manslaughter in the Second Degree for causing a fatal overdose or partnering with our Federal partners and prosecuting dealers under 18 U.S.C. § 841 (b)(1)(C) which carries a term of imprisonment of not less than twenty years. The threat of prosecution in these cases will undoubtedly lead to information on the large-scale distribution rings bringing these deadly substances into our community.

In addition to the foregoing, Judge Walsh's office will continue to utilize the multi-jurisdictional Rockland County Narcotics Task Force to employ all cutting-edge investigative tactics to arrest and prosecute drug dealers. We will also hold medical professionals responsible who over prescribe these narcotics that have undoubtedly contributed to this epidemic.

4. **Education** – In order to effectively attack this epidemic, we must focus on reducing the risk factors of this complex issue of opioid misuse and educate our community and promote factors that increase resiliency. Judge Walsh's office will work with the school districts, the local police department DARE programs, and the Rockland Council on Alcohol and other Drug Dependencies ("RCADD") to educate students, families and educators about the dangers of opioid misuse and about ways to prevent and treat opioid addiction. We will deploy members of our office to local community meetings and actively engage the public to get involved in helping eradicate this problem from our County.

Propose Legislation

Moreover, Judge Walsh will work with local lawmakers and push them to enact legislation that will require all public buildings to have Narcan on site. The District Attorney's office under Judge Walsh's leadership will offer free seminars to teach people how to administer this life saving medication used to counteract the dangerous impact of opioids overdoses. In addition, his office will partner with law enforcement and local pharmacies and host monthly Drug Take Back Days.

Litigation Against Manufacturers of Prescription Opiates

In 2018, the County Executive signed a resolution authorizing litigation against manufacturers of prescription Opiates (<http://rocklandgov.com/departments/county-executive/press-releases/2019-press-releases/legal-action-against-opioid-manufacturers/>). Judge Walsh's office will partner with Bransetter, Stranch & Jennings, PLLC and assist in holding pharmaceutical companies civilly liable for this deadly epidemic. The monies recovered from these corporations would be utilized to help treat our residents who have fallen victim to their marketing and highly addictive substances.

Conclusion

The opioid epidemic is now responsible for approximately 130 deaths a day and meaningful action must be taken to address this problem. Judge Walsh's initiative "Hope" for Rockland offers the right balance of enforcement and a greater focus on prevention, treatment, and alternative to incarceration programs to address this crisis. Together we can provide "Hope" for Rockland in battling this epidemic here in our County.

4. Police Executive Research Forum. *The Unprecedented Opioid Epidemic: as overdoses become a leading cause of death, police, sheriffs, and health agencies must step up their response.* (2017): 5-6

5. Id.

