

Group seeks heroin detox help for teens from PTA, state

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Teenagers have no place to go on [Long Island](#) to detox from heroin and other drugs, so a [Suffolk](#) group is pushing for a law to provide hospital beds and wants support for the measure from the state's highest coalition of parents and teachers.

The request for support, to be brought before the state's PTA convention this weekend by a Sachem schools group, also calls for a change in state law that would allow parents to compel their teenage children to enter medically necessary detox without a court order. The resolution targets a group particularly hard-hit on Long Island by addiction.

"Parents have a sense of urgency," said Gail Grenzig, Sachem's assistant superintendent for personnel and a member of the group. "We realize across Long Island that this is something affecting our adolescents."

Now, state law allows parents to intervene to get their child into detox only through court.

The group, Adolescent Wellness Addressing Addiction Through Community Resources and Education, or AWARE, is composed mostly of members of the Sachem community.

There is no place on Long Island for anyone under the age of 18 to get detox from heroin that requires medical intervention.

Proposal expected to pass

The resolution is expected to pass overwhelmingly. Its chances in the state legislature aren't known, since the group hasn't yet lobbied legislators directly. "In order to effect change, you need momentum," Grenzig said. "We have that on the local level. Now the PTA will take it to the state level."

Passage by the state PTA delegates would allow any PTA group to lobby legislators for detox facilities with the group's full backing. The [New York State United Teachers Association](#), the state teachers union, says it backs the idea.

"We are certainly supportive of the concept, and willing to work collaboratively with the PTA's leaders on Long Island and around the state, to not only stop drug abuse but also provide necessary help for those in the grips of addiction," said Carl Korn, a NYSUT spokesman.

Heroin addiction has made significant inroads on Long Island, and treatment experts say they are seeing more adolescents. Statistics from the Suffolk County medical examiner show that there have been 173 heroin-related deaths from 2006 to present, and one out of every 10 have been under 21. The youngest was 14.

Suffolk Legis. Lynne Nowick (R-[St. James](#)) said she backs the resolution. "Parents are absolutely at their wit's end," she said.

Treatment push weighed

Officials at the state Office of Alcohol, Substance Abuse Services said they are closely watching the PTA efforts. Still, they pointed to other ways of dealing with heroin abuse through outpatient means as well.

Some experts question how effective rehab can be unless the person being treated, whatever the age, does so voluntarily. "Supporting the development of a healthy autonomy is of particular importance with children and is fostered when they are given some control over their lives within the safeguards of the therapeutic environment as well as protective services," the state substance abuse services office told Newsday.

But members of the Sachem Alliance say the lack of parental control over their addicted children is a big hole in the system, and the crisis makes it more palpable for those who find themselves up against the law when trying to get treatment for their adolescent children.

"We keep coming back to our purpose," said Denise Dolan, assistant principal at Sachem East High School. "Other groups are addressing prevention, but no one else is addressing detoxification for adolescents."