



CITY OF NEW YORK
PRESIDENT
OF THE
BOROUGH OF STATEN ISLAND

JAMES S. ODDO
PRESIDENT

BOROUGH HALL
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10301

May 5, 2014

The Honorable Peter Shumlin
Governor
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Governor Shumlin:

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am certain that your powerful 2014 State of the State Address had an effect on Vermont residents, particularly those who were unaware of the extent of the drug addiction crisis in your state.

I can tell you that your speech also had a profound effect on those involved in the drug treatment community in my hometown. I serve as the Borough President of Staten Island, NY. As you may know, Staten Island, with a population of about 500,000 is the smallest and most suburban of the five boroughs that make up New York City. While we are a part of the New York City metropolis, the fact is that in some areas we are probably more similar to communities in other states, states like Vermont.

One unfortunate way in which we are very similar to your state is the raging opioid epidemic that is devastating our neighborhoods. In fact, on page A1 in today's *New York Times* there is a sobering look at the heroin scourge ravaging my borough, entitled "Heroin's New Hometown." This is a distinction that no community wants to have.

The reality is that each week, two to three Staten Islanders die of heroin or prescription opioid overdoses. Two to three might not seem like much until one starts multiplying that by weeks, and then by months, and then by years.

Very similar to the problem facing Vermont, the heroin problem on Staten Island affects all sectors of society – it does not discriminate based on race, gender, age, or socioeconomic class – in fact, the epicenter of this problem on Staten Island seems to be our middle-class and more affluent neighborhoods. All of us in my community know of a family that has been affected by addiction. Although we are a borough of a half million people, in many ways we are more like a small town than part of a major city.

The problem of drug addiction is difficult to solve for many reasons, including the fact that it carries a stigma that people would rather not acknowledge or discuss. But to solve the problem we must talk about it. That is why when you spoke about it on such an auspicious occasion as your State of the State speech, while the media was watching, it was such an important step in convincing people to acknowledge the problem and begin to have frank discussions about it.

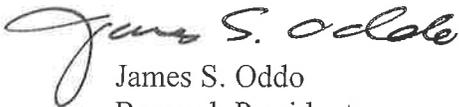
You have demonstrated that you are a national leader on this serious issue and I am asking for the opportunity to partner with you and your team. Specifically, I am interested in learning more from your staff about some of the specific actions you are taking to battle the problem so that we can learn from you and institute our own version of your best practices. In your speech, you outlined four areas of action: dramatically increasing access to treatment, convincing drug users in the criminal justice system to accept treatment, stronger and more coordinated law enforcement, and preventing addiction in the first place. These four points are excellent starting points.

As a community, I know we are not alone. I know that there are other families in other parts of our nation going through the same trauma caused by this crisis. I also know that there are leaders, like yourself, who are dedicated to solving it.

I am becoming hesitant to pick up our local newspaper because far too often there is an obituary published announcing the death of a 20-something Staten Islander who, although the cause of death is usually not listed, I know probably died from a drug overdose.

I thank you for your time, courtesy, and consideration. Please do not hesitate to have the appropriate member of your staff reach out to Christopher DeCicco of my staff at 718-816-2056 or via email at cdecicco@stateninsula.com to discuss this issue in greater detail.

Very truly yours,



James S. Oddo
Borough President