

June 11, 2015

The Honorable Bill de Blasio  
Mayor, City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am writing to appeal for your assistance in fighting the prescription drug/heroin epidemic that continues to plague the borough of Staten Island. Consider these facts from the Epi-Data Tables of the Department of Health for the years 2012 and 2013:

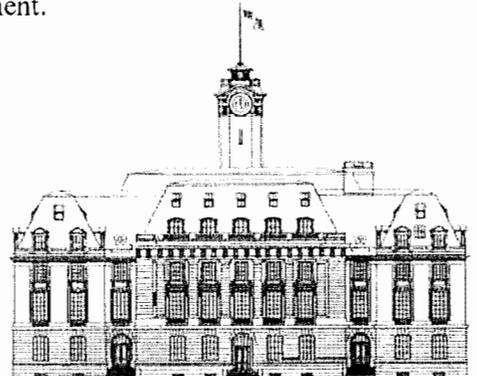
- *One Staten Islander died of an unintentional drug overdose every five days*
- *Staten Islanders died of an unintentional drug overdose at a rate 18.8 deaths/100,000 residents, the highest in the city.*
- *Deaths related to opioid analgesics cut across all socio-economic strata, with almost 60% occurring in the wealthiest neighborhoods.*

The loss of any child, for any reason, is tragic, but to see young men and women die without doing everything within our power, as a civil society, to prevent it is even more so. We cannot allow funding to prevent us from using every weapon in our arsenal to defeat this enemy.

In the 1990's, when our city was gripped by a similarly preventable problem, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we had the foresight to see that education was of unparalleled importance. The Department of Education mandated a K-12 HIV/AIDS curriculum, which, though it has been modified over the years as medical advances were made, is still being taught today.

I believe it is past time we considered fighting the battle against prescription drugs and heroin abuse the same way – by mandating a Pre-K through 12 anti-drug curriculum. Funding for this initiative should be a top priority.

Here on Staten Island we have introduced a pilot program in four elementary schools called Too Good for Drugs. We utilized an evidence-based curriculum (of the same name) taught to fifth graders by both the class teacher and a uniformed officer of the New York City Police Department.



Through this program we have reached about 300 kids – and though we are still in the process of doing a post-program analysis, by all accounts it went better than we could have hoped. Not only did it teach students good decision-making skills, we recognized as an added bonus that real community-building was taking place between the police officers and the students.

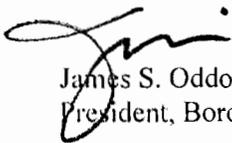
When this curriculum was evaluated by the Florida Department of Education, their conclusion was:

"The prevention program was also successful in impacting four of the five protective factors associated with strengthening children's ability to make positive, healthy decisions-emotional competency skills, social and resistance skills, goal setting and decision making skills, and perceptions of harmful effects of drug use. TGFD program was effective for students regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background."

Drug abuse is a matter of life and death for the young people of our city, and for those who graduate from prescription drugs to heroin it is simply a matter of when they are going to die. I ask you to work shoulder-to-shoulder with me and with those who have the most opportunity to shape the future of our children, and who probably spend more waking hours with them than their parents – our teachers.

Staten Island is in the throes of an epidemic. Please consider allocating the resources necessary to fund this curriculum, so that by the time today's pre-kindergartners become tomorrow's high school seniors, they will look upon what is happening today as the bad old days, and wonder how kids could ever have been stupid enough to throw their lives away for a cheap high.

Sincerely,



James S. Oddo  
President, Borough of Staten Island

2/2 Cc: The Honorable Carmen Farina, Chancellor, New York City Department of Education  
Cc: Emma Wolfe, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs