

KATE BROWNING NEWS

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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FEDERAL JUDGE'S RULING HURTS RECOVERY, PROMOTES ADDICTION AND PROFITEERING

BROWNING VOWS TO FIGHT DECISION/CREATE SAFE AND EFFECTIVE TREATMENT



Mastic, NY – A U.S. District Court Judge last week ruled in favor Oxford House, an umbrella organization of sober homes, and prohibited Suffolk County from enforcing its 2003 Sober Home Law. Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley), who has taken the lead in advocating for sober home reform, vowed to fight the federal court ruling that prohibits Suffolk County from implementing the 2003 law aimed at regulating the ever increasing problems of unregulated “sober homes”.

The county law set new guidelines that required organizations and owners to acquire a license and pay a fee in order to become certified as a sober home operator. The regulations also called for a 24/7 house manager to live on site, no more than six individuals receiving treatment to live in each home, and a site selection process that took into account saturation levels in specific neighborhoods and required public hearings before a home opened. The federal judge ruled that Suffolk County’s law violated the Federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) and discriminated against disabled individuals.

“The judge’s decision is flawed and out of touch with the reality that persons in need of recovery are living with everyday”, stated Browning. “This isn’t a NIMBY law, but rather a policy that would protect these individuals and provide them with the tools they need to be productive members of society. Judge Bianco’s ruling claims that this discriminates against them, but in fact it would be a tremendous help to those in recovery.”

There are currently no regulations for “sober homes” in New York State, and while many homes are run by experienced organizations that set their own rules and guidelines, there is a separate network of landlords who hide behind federal anti-discrimination laws, and take advantage of the system to the detriment of their tenants. Legislator Browning’s district, which includes the hamlets of Shirley, Mastic, Mastic Beach, Coram, and Bellport among other communities, has been beset by predatory property owners who establish phony sober homes, profiteering at the expense of vulnerable individuals and the neighboring community.

“It’s scary out there,” continued Browning. “Drug addiction is on the rise in our schools and all over Long Island. Coupled with the new Rockefeller Drug Law reforms we are going to see more and more drug users released into our communities and there is no support system in place to handle the increased demand. The problem is only going to get worse, and this court decision has taken us a step back. I am not going to sit by while our children are dying and allow ill advised courts to throw out laws we desperately need because the courts are blind to the seriousness of the situation.”

Legislator Browning is closely reviewing the court’s decision and has vowed to introduce new legislation that will effectively get control over the bad sober homes by avoiding the loopholes in the federal laws.

“The judge ruled in favor of speculators that are exploiting those in recovery,” concluded Browning. “This fight has been long and hard, but I will not stop until real reform has been achieved.”