

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK

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COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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OVERSIGHT FOR SUFFOLK SOBER HOMES TAKES STEP FORWARD

Browning Establishes Public/Private Board to Ensure Accountability



(Legislator Kate Browning, at podium, is joined by Suffolk County Legislator Jay Schneiderman; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair of the Welfare to Work Commission; Bob DeBona, President of the Mastic Beach Property Owner's Association; Jeff Reynolds, Executive Director of LICADD; John Haley of the Seafield Center; Art Flescher, Director of Community Mental Hygiene Services; Mike Stoltz, Clubhouse of Suffolk; Commissioner James Tomarken, S.C. Department of health Services; Commissioner Gregory Blass, S.C. Department of Social Services; and Richard Koubeck, Chair of the Welfare to Work Commission)

Riverhead, NY – Standing outside a sober home today that reflects what Suffolk County wants to see more of, well run homes that are tied to programs, Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) joined with Legislator Jay Schneiderman (I-Montauk), Welfare to Work Commission members, Suffolk County Social Services and Health Services officials, John Haley of the Seafield Center and civic leaders to announce the creation Suffolk County's first ever Sober Home Network and oversight board to oversee the program.

In the wake of a drug epidemic on Long Island involving heroin and prescription pills, Suffolk County is close to opening the doors to well-run sober homes this fall by kicking off a pilot project initiated by Legislator Kate Browning. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was completed in the spring and several responders are

finalizing contracts with Suffolk County's Department of Social Services. The second component of the pilot project moved forward last Tuesday when Introductory Resolution 1543-11 was approved at the Suffolk County Legislature's general meeting. The legislation sponsored by Legislator Browning creates the first Sober Home Oversight Board in New York State.

"New York State has not done their job in providing adequate recovery housing, and the result has been out of control boarding homes that are preying on our vulnerable populations and wasting taxpayer money," stated Legislator Browning. "With the help of the Welfare to Work Commission and our Department of Social Service and Health Services, Suffolk County is changing that. This program and oversight board will set a precedent for other counties and the state."

The 18 member oversight board is charged with keeping a close eye on the homes that are certified to operate and receive referrals from the county. Homes that have been accepted must have a license with the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and meet guidelines set forth by the county. The board has representation from town, county, and state agencies as well as drug treatment agencies, consumers of sober homes, emergency services, and housing agencies not participating in the program. The board's main mission will be to advise the county on the success of the rules and regulations and what changes may be needed. The rules and regulations they will help oversee include:

- Provide an alcohol and drug free residence for unrelated adults who are recovering from drug and/or alcohol addictions;
- Monitor alcohol and/or substance abuse treatment for residents of the facility;
- Coordinate and communicate with the Suffolk County Department of Social Services, the primary treatment facility and Industrial Medicine Associates (IMA/SAAM), if appropriate, regarding referrals, treatment compliance and progress of residents;
- Establish and enforce a zero tolerance policy for alcohol and drug usage;
- Provide supervision of residence at all times when residents are on site;
- Establish and enforce evening curfew hours.
- Provide common living space for residents for the purpose of promoting abstinence, recreation, governance of house rules and a support network;
- Provide in-house rules and regulations relative to the health and safety of the residents and staff which shall be in written form and prominently displayed;
- Maintain residence consistent with the surrounding community standards.
- Submit proof of licensing as a substance and alcohol abuse treatment provider certified by, and in good standing with, the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS).
- Comply with all Federal, State and local building codes and ordinances;
- Cooperate with unannounced inspections of the premises by DSS to ensure compliance with the services and qualifications contained within this RFQ.

"The Commission's report on Suffolk sober homes, released in May, 2010, revealed a pattern of abuse and neglect that harms recovering substance abusers and the neighborhoods in which unregulated rogue sober homes exist," stated Richard Koubeck, Chair of the Welfare to Work Commission. "This resolution is an important first step toward the regulation and reform of Suffolk's sober homes."

Legislator Browning has been a strong proponent of sober home reform in Suffolk County and created the program after years of attempting to get OASAS to take a more active role in regulating sober homes. This is the first sober home network in New York State and will be a poster child for other municipalities and eventually the state.

“I took multiple trips to Albany over several years asking for sober home reform and nothing has been done,” stated Legislator Kate Browning. “While Suffolk County’s Sober Home network will not remove bad homes from the community, it is the first step in directing taxpayer money away from rogue homes and instead spending public monies on well-run homes that are tied with treatment. Today’s vote was the final piece of the puzzle by putting in place the proper oversight and accountability. I hope New York State will take our model and implement it statewide.”

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