

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



KATE BROWNING
County Legislator, 3rd District
Health and Human Services, Chair

1120 Montauk Hwy., Suite G
Mastic, NY 11950
Fax: (631) 852-1303

Media Release

COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Contact: Joshua Slaughter
631-852-1300
631-456-1718

January 10, 2012

A CALL FOR PANIC ALARMS IN SUFFOLK PHARMACIES

Browning, Tri-Hamlet Committee Asking Drug Stores to Voluntarily Participate

Mastic, NY – Protecting consumers and employees at pharmacies all across Long Island has become urgently needed in the wake of the Father’s Day Massacre in Medford and an attempted robbery of a Shirley Rite Aid in 2011. A sub-committee on Public Safety formed out of the Tri-Hamlet Initiative and Chaired by Suffolk County Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley), is working to do just that through an effort to convince local pharmacies to install panic alarms in all of their stores.

In a letter to Pharmacies dated December 7, 2011 Legislator Browning stated, “A panic alarm would be beneficial because, as we all discovered, it is not only employees of pharmacies who could potentially be in danger, but also consumers who utilize these pharmacies.” Panic alarms have been used throughout Suffolk County for domestic violence victims, banks and other high risk populations when police officers need to be alerted of an emergency and respond as quickly as possible. Panic alarms are also unique in that the perpetrator is not made aware that police have been notified, which could save countless lives. Shortly after the letter was mailed a pharmacy in Seaford was robbed and an off-duty federal agent was killed while attempting to apprehend the criminal.

“These robberies are becoming more and more violent,” stated Legislator Kate Browning. “Panic alarms are a low cost security measure that can help a pharmacist alert police of a crime without escalating an already dangerous situation. By decreasing response time without criminals being aware we can hopefully catch them in the act without causing a perpetrator to take more drastic actions.”

“Unfortunately the face of the addict has changed in recent years,” stated Eric Fischer, Public Safety Committee member. “The drug of choice has changed from an illegal substance smuggled into the country to what can be smuggled out of someone’s medicine cabinet. The drugs that support this habit have become the epicenter of the addict’s life and he will go to extremes to get them. We must take immediate action to deter this senseless crime and protect the community at large.”

While Legislator Browning’s committee has asked pharmacies to voluntarily make the upgrade, Legislator Browning is researching possible legislation to make it law if pharmacies do not agree to do it on their own. Also, Legislator Browning has reached out to the Suffolk County Police Department to see if they could help supply the devices to mom-and-pop pharmacies since this is already done for residential homes in the event it is needed.

“I am hopeful that pharmacies will take action to voluntarily protect their employees and customers,” concluded Browning. “It’s a low cost measure that can save lives and help deal with the drug crisis we are facing. However, if the response does not show there is a willingness to participate I will consider legislation to require panic alarms.”

“With the introduction of panic alarms we are taking the first steps in providing safe places for the community and helping to implement tougher regulations for those who are providing these "legal medications", but also for those who are using it,” stated Amy Alfonso, Public Safety Committee member. “We can no longer stand by and allow the lives of our residents to be at risk. Now is the time to act before more innocent people get hurt or die!”

The potential street value of a pharmacy’s inventory far exceeds what the criminal would hope to get from a bank robbery, yet pharmacies have minimal security. The Medford robbery netted the criminals at least 10,000 hydrocodone pills with an estimated street value over \$25,000. Stores that cash checks have bullet proof glass in place, jewelry stores must buzz you in and even convenience stores use drop safes to protect their most valuable asset, cash. It is time pharmacies begin to provide the level of security that these similar establishments already have in place.

To date Legislator Browning has not received responses from any of the pharmacies since her letter was sent, but she looks forward to working with all businesses who agree that better security is needed.

###