ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION
No. 18

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
217th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2016 SESSION

Sponsored by:
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District 18 (Middlesex)
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SYNOPSIS
Designates October of each year as “Opioid Abuse Prevention Month.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 7/14/2017)
A JOINT RESOLUTION designating October of each year as “Opioid Abuse Prevention Month” in New Jersey.

WHEREAS, According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, abuse of prescription painkillers, also called opioid pain relievers, is a “growing, deadly epidemic”; and

WHEREAS, Since 1990, drug overdose death rates in the United States have more than tripled, with nearly three-fourths of these deaths attributable to prescription painkillers; and

WHEREAS, The unprecedented rise in overdose deaths in the U.S. parallels a nearly 300 percent increase in the sale of opioid pain relievers, such as Oxycodone and Percocet, since 1999; and

WHEREAS, Prescription painkillers work by binding to receptors in the brain to decrease the perception of pain, thereby creating a powerful feeling of euphoria, physical dependence, and in some cases, addiction; and

WHEREAS, The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports that many people who begin their drug use with prescription painkillers go on to use heroin, a highly dangerous, semi-synthetic opioid drug; and

WHEREAS, The switch from opioid pain relievers to heroin often comes when users are struggling with withdrawal and requiring higher doses to ease their symptoms, but can no longer afford to purchase prescription painkillers, which are far more expensive on the illegal drug market; and

WHEREAS, Between 2007 and 2012, the number of people reporting heroin use in the U.S. increased from 373,000 to 669,000, with nearly 80 percent of heroin users reporting previous prescription painkiller abuse; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration reports that two in five teenagers mistakenly believe prescription drugs are “much safer” than illegal drugs, and three in 10 teens mistakenly believe prescription painkillers are not addictive; and

WHEREAS, The State Commission of Investigation (SCI) recently reported that New Jersey is in the midst of this prescription pill and heroin epidemic; and

WHEREAS, According to that report, between 2006 and 2011, the number of individuals who entered New Jersey drug addiction treatment centers for opioid pill addictions tripled, from 2,700 to 8,600, with roughly half age 25 or younger; and

WHEREAS, During that same time, the number of people admitted for heroin addiction jumped by one-third for those under age 25 to more than 6,600; and

WHEREAS, In 2011, there were 337 mixed-drug deaths involving Oxycodone, a 38 percent increase from 2010, and 368 mixed drug deaths involving heroin, a 28 percent increase from 2010; and
WHEREAS, The SCI reported that abuse of prescription painkillers has triggered a resurgence in the availability of cheap heroin in urban, suburban, and rural areas of New Jersey; and
WHEREAS, The rise in opioid addiction has also led to a growing number of robberies, assaults, and thefts in the State, which, in turn, has required law enforcement to devote increasing resources to this epidemic; and
WHEREAS, According to the Drug Policy Alliance, the State is also facing a public health crisis due to the spread of HIV and hepatic C among heroin and other drug users; and
WHEREAS, New Jersey currently has the 5th highest adult HIV rate in the country, the 3rd highest pediatric HIV rate in the country, and the highest proportion of women infected with HIV/AIDS in the country, with 45 percent of all infections attributable to the sharing of infected syringes; and
WHEREAS, The overall cost of pervasive opioid abuse in New Jersey is immeasurable: lives are lost, families destroyed, human potential wasted, and society diminished; and
WHEREAS, In order to effectively address this issue, greater recognition of the dangers of opioid abuse is needed among lawmakers, law enforcement officials, parents, community leaders, and all residents of the State; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. The month of October each year shall be designated as “Opioid Abuse Prevention Month,” to promote ongoing education about the signs and consequences of opioid abuse, to recognize and advance efforts to end opioid abuse and promote rehabilitation and recovery for abusers, and to encourage support for those who suffer the effects of opioid abuse throughout the State of New Jersey and across the country.

2. The Governor shall annually issue a proclamation recognizing October as “Opioid Abuse Prevention Month” in New Jersey and shall call upon public officials and the citizens of this State to observe the month with appropriate activities and programs.

3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This joint resolution designates October of each year as “Opioid Abuse Prevention Month,” in order to promote ongoing education about opioid abuse, to recognize and advance efforts to end this
epidemic, and to encourage support for those who suffer the effects of opioid abuse.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, abuse of prescription painkillers, also called opioid pain relievers, is a “growing, deadly epidemic.” Since 1990, drug overdose death rates in the U.S. have more than tripled, with nearly three-fourths of these deaths attributable to prescription painkillers. This unprecedented rise in overdose deaths parallels a nearly 300 percent increase in the sale of opioid pain relievers, such as Oxycodone and Percocet, since 1999. Reports indicate that many people who begin their drug use with prescription painkillers go on to use heroin, a highly dangerous, semi-synthetic opioid drug. The switch often comes when users are struggling with withdrawal and require cheaper, higher opiate doses to ease their symptoms. Studies have shown that the vast majority of heroin users have previously used prescription drugs.

The State Commission of Investigation recently reported that New Jersey is in the midst of this prescription pill and heroin epidemic. Between 2006 and 2011, New Jersey drug treatment facilities saw unprecedented increases in the number of individuals seeking treatment for opioid pill and heroin addictions, particularly among those ages 25 or younger. The rise in opioid addiction has had drastic consequences on the health and safety of New Jersey residents. Over the past few years, the number of robberies, assaults, and thefts tied to opioid abuse has risen. New Jersey also has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the country, spurred, in part, by the sharing of contaminated syringes among heroin users. In order to effectively address these issues, greater recognition of the dangers of opioid abuse is needed among lawmakers, law enforcement, parents, community leaders, and all residents of the State.

This joint resolution requires the Governor to issue an annual proclamation calling upon public officials and the citizens of this State to observe “Opioid Abuse Prevention Month” with appropriate activities and programs.