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ADDICTION IS A DISEASE, BUT IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN MEDICINE TO CURE

While our new President appears obsessed with the size of the crowd at his Inauguration, in the Garden State, focus has been directed on retarding the intensifying tragedy of substance misuse. Governor Chris Christie devoted almost two-thirds of his State of the State Message to finding solutions to this social dilemma. Many of his initiatives have made their way to the state Legislature where their fate will be ultimately determined. Late in February, Christie will unveil his proposed state Budget for the next fiscal year. It is there that the platitudes must be converted to the bones and sinew of public policy. Our Public Affairs Unit and Advocates will be involved in the process at every juncture to ensure that only practical, life-enhancing (and in some cases, life-saving) measures are adopted.

VICTORY

Governor Christie signed three proposals in to law in recent weeks.

- S.372/A.2292- Requires the Department of Education to include age appropriate and evidence-based instruction on addiction in the Core Curriculum Content Standards.
- S.384/A.3470- Mandates that jails and prisons provide medications that were prescribed for chronic illnesses prior to incarceration.
- A.3744/S.230- Establishes county and municipal law enforcement assisted addiction and recovery programs.

The NCADD-NJ Advocates met with legislators, provided testimony, and called the Governor's Office in a successful drive to see these bills enacted in to law.



- S.295/A.2334 – Authorizes pharmacists to provide naloxone (Narcan) to patients without an individual prescription – Passed Senate, in Assembly committee
- S.383 – Requires that certain physicians working in jails and prisons be sufficiently trained in treating persons with addictions – In committee
- A.2619/S.2409 – Mandates that certain prisoners with detainers (open charges in other jurisdictions) be provided access to in-prison drug treatment programs – On Governor’s desk
- A.3684 – Directs the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services to facilitate the establishment of four new recovery community centers – In committee
- S.2635/A.4177 – Requires high schools to maintain a supply of naloxone (Narcan). Also, school nurses would be permitted to administer it, and would be held legally harmless for their actions in proffering it. S.2635 has been released from the Education Committee and has traveled to the Budget and Appropriations Committee. A.4177 is in the Education Committee.
- S.307/A.4362 – Would create a Veterans’ Diversion Program to steer certain former service members, with low-level criminal charges and a history of mental illness and/or substance misuse, away from the court system, and in to appropriate treatment. S.307 has already passed the Senate. A.4362 was reported out of the Military and Veterans’ Affairs Committee and sent to the Appropriations Committee.

For more information about these bills visit www.njleg.state.nj.us



After months of effort, two measures have been introduced with the strong involvement and support of NCADD-NJ.

- Senators Joseph Vitale and Teresa Ruiz have introduced S.2967 mandating that every high school in the state utilize some form of Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) for its students. SBIRT is an oral screening tool to start and encourage a conversation between the youngster and a counselor or nurse. Its intended implementation is with young people who are beginning to exhibit behavioral problems that might be a consequence of misuse of alcohol or drugs. The goal is to hinder any early use of illicit substances by establishing a trusting relationship between the student and a caring adult. SBIRT has already been adopted in limited circumstances with adults at a number of hospitals and medical centers in New Jersey.
- A.4498/S.2919- Would improve oversight and enforcement of behavioral health parity laws. The legislation would enhance the transparency of the state and federal policies requiring that health benefits coverage for behavioral issues be reimbursed on a par with medical and surgical ailments. The bill was drafted by the Kennedy Forum, begun and headed by former Congressman Patrick Kennedy. The measure would, among other things, mandate a public reporting of insurance claims denials and their reasons. It would further improve the mechanisms within the state Department of Banking and Insurance to enforce parity compliance. NCADD-NJ has been convening and hosting meetings of the NJ Parity Coalition that has formed to seek enactment of this change. The Coalition consists of people in recovery and their families, service providers, and health care advocates. It has uncovered a wide array of seemingly routine coverage denials and cut-backs that appear in conflict with the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA). On January 30, the Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee released A.4498 to the Floor on an 8-0-3 vote.