



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
RICHMOND COUNTY

---

MICHAEL E. MCMAHON  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

130 STUYVESANT PLACE  
STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK 10301  
TELEPHONE (718) 876-6300

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release on January 31, 2018

Contact: Ryan Lavis (718) 556-7150  
[Ryan.Lavis@rcda.nyc.gov](mailto:Ryan.Lavis@rcda.nyc.gov)

### **D.A. McMahon, NYPD, and Partners Commemorate 1-Year Anniversary of HOPE Program on Staten Island**

*\*\*First of its kind diversion program redirects low-level drug offenders, pre-arraignment, into community-based treatment services, instead of jail and prosecution\*\**

Staten Island, N.Y. – Today, Richmond County District Attorney Michael E. McMahon joined Borough President James Oddo, NYPD Commissioner James P. O’Neill, New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) Commissioner Arlene Gonzalez-Sánchez, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, The Legal Aid Society, the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Staten Island Performing Provider System, the Staten Island Partnership for Community Wellness, and Staten Island providers – Community Health Action of Staten Island, Christopher’s Reason, and YMCA Counseling Services – to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Heroin Overdose Prevention & Education (HOPE) program. HOPE is the first of its kind diversion program in New York City to redirect low-level drug offenders in Staten Island, pre-arraignment, to community-based health and treatment services, instead of jail and prosecution. Developed specifically for Staten Island, HOPE brings together groups from across the spectrum of law enforcement, treatment and social service providers, multiple interdisciplinary city agencies, and the Staten Island community with the goal of reducing overdoses, improving health outcomes by exposing those in need to treatment options and resources, including harm reduction services and peer coaches, and improving public safety by reducing the criminal activity of participants in the program and diverting persons with addiction from the criminal justice system.

To further remove the stigma associated with substance use disorder, HOPE leverages peer recovery networks to serve as the initial face of the program in addition to providing support throughout the participant’s trajectory through the program. This role is crucial as the peers have lived experience and have navigated either the criminal justice or substance use treatment systems in their lives.

When an individual is arrested for the charge of Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the 7<sup>th</sup> Degree, a misdemeanor, the police and peers immediately engage the person at the police precinct, educating the participant about the benefits of the HOPE program, providing naloxone training and a kit, and a palm card with contact information for the resource and recovery centers, the RCDA HOPE Director, and Legal Aid and the Defense Bar. The peer also offers to accompany the individual to a community based resource and recovery center where they will undergo an assessment and a referral to treatment or social support

services

Since its launch date in January 2017, the HOPE program has helped connect hundreds of individuals with substance abuse treatment services. The program has been so successful that it is currently being duplicated in other boroughs of New York City.

### **HOPE Program Data – Launched 1/17/17**

- 338 individuals have been offered HOPE
- 315 were met at the precinct by a peer/staff
- 265 individuals received naloxone trainings; 248 naloxone kits distributed
- 291 individuals have been to a Resource Center, received an assessment, and signed waivers.
- 263 participants (90%) have meaningfully engaged and their cases have been withdrawn.
  
- 101 people have been referred to outpatient treatment programs
- 24 people have been referred to inpatient treatment programs
- 14 people have been referred to detox programs
- 24 people have been referred to harm reduction programs
- 69 people have received services exclusively at the Recovery Centers

### **Stories of HOPE**

**The following are excerpts written by individuals who participated in the HOPE program and meaningfully engaged, and successfully had their cases withdrawn.**

*“Within minutes of talking to my counselor I felt a genuine caring and empathetic person talking to me, the person sitting in front of her instead of a faceless statistic or paycheck like I've felt my whole life dealing with "the system". I knew from years of experience that I wasn't being judged or out in a box of pre conceived labels that separate the person being treated from the person trying to treat them. I was very surprised and caught off guard to be opening up completely and without holding back and just saying what I thought I needed to say to play the game I thought I knew the rules to. Your follow up call the next day only confirmed what I was so shocked to have been shown. A genuine concern for the individual that I thought the system was incapable of. Even though the program was only 30 days, it gave me hope, not only for myself, but for the children that might be helped the way I could have been helped so many years ago when I really needed it.”*

*“I just want to personally thank you for everything you've done for me from the bottom of my heart I appreciate everything thank you and I am doing very, very well!!”*

=====

“Since its inception, HOPE has offered better access to treatment services and an alternative to the court for hundreds of Staten Islanders struggling with substance abuse disorder. While the heroin and opioid epidemic continues to claim far too many lives, the success stories that have come out of the HOPE program have been truly inspiring,” said **District Attorney Michael E. McMahon**. “We are continuing our battle to lock up the dealers who put this poison on our streets but too often in our criminal justice system, individuals suffering from substance abuse disorder find that treatment or services are too far out of their reach or offered too late in the process to have meaning in their lives. Quite simply, they were dying before we could get them help. HOPE speeds up this process by immediately offering individuals arrested on low-level drug charges, who have little to no criminal record, access to peer coaches and treatment and health services upon their arrest,

with the promise of avoiding a criminal record if they successfully complete the program.

**McMahon** continued, “A year later, this collaborative effort between my office, the NYPD, the public health community, and all of our partners, continues to grow and serve as a model for how large cities can address this crisis by both saving lives and reducing crime. The fact that we could pull this together with all these diverse partners is a tribute to Staten Island. Yes, the problem is terrible here, but our spirit of community and loyalty to each other will allow us to prevail in this, the greatest challenge of our times.”

**NYPD Commissioner James P. O’Neill said**, “Preserving life is part of the NYPD’s mission. The HOPE program allows us to work in partnership with the Richmond County District Attorney and the community to do just that and we are committed to its success.”

**Borough President James Oddo** said, “The HOPE program does exactly what its moniker says – it offers those caught in the throes of addiction the hope of a better future free of opioids. I commend DA McMahon and all who continue to work so hard saving lives. The problem continues to require a multi-faceted response, including educating our young people so they don’t start in the first place, investigating and locking up those dealers who prey on Staten Islanders, and helping those addicted get the help they need. For the past year, HOPE has been helping those addicted with help and a way out. It is a remarkable collaboration, one that will continue to save lives.”

**Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice**, said, “The City is working with experts in public health, social services and law enforcement to divert individuals with behavioral health needs into appropriate health care. DA McMahon has forged an important path to ensure that law enforcement and health professionals work together to find solutions to issues of mental health and drug dependence and we are happy to partner with him in this work.”

**Christopher Pisciotta, the Legal Aid Society, Attorney in Charge, Richmond County Office**, said, “On this anniversary of the HOPE program, we see the amazing impact this innovative program has had in our community. HOPE touched and changed lives in the midst of this public health crisis from opioids. HOPE connected hundreds of people fighting addiction with resources, support and guidance to provide people with a path to help themselves in this fight against addiction. The creative program addresses the need without bringing the burden of a criminal record or the stigma that often attaches. Staten Island has embraced HOPE and HOPE has become a model for other communities that too are combating this health crisis. With creative programs to address addiction such as HOPE and greater use of treatment programs for those currently in the criminal justice system, we must continue to help those in need to help themselves and change the paths of their lives.”

**OASAS Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez** said, “People suffering from addiction need hope and treatment to promote their recovery. I congratulate District Attorney McMahon on the HOPE Program’s first successful year and look forward to many more to come.”

**New York City Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett** said, “The Staten Island HOPE program is an innovative public safety approach to connecting more people at risk of drug overdose to services and support in Staten Island. This program is an example of innovation born of community and government collaboration to respond to substance misuse and overdose.”

**Joseph Conte, PhD, Executive Director at the Staten Island Performing Provider System**, said, “The Staten Island PPS is proud to have been invited to support the HOPE program with the Richmond County DA’s Office and all of the wonderful partners that helped make the initiative a success. The PPS, through the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program, is committed to improving the quality of care and health outcomes for Staten Island residents through partnership and innovation. The HOPE program embodies those goals through multi-partner collaboration and the transformation of a traditional stigmatized

paradigm into a flexible, person-centered approach that has connected hundreds of individuals to substance use recovery services and saved numerous lives from drug overdoses this past year. Above all, DSRIP data sources show improved access and engagement with substance use disorder services for this population and is looking forward to witnessing the remarkable successes of the HOPE program going forward.”

**Adrienne Abbate, Executive Director, Staten Island Partnership for Community Wellness,** said, “Partners dedicated to addressing substance misuse across Staten Island knew that the status quo was not working in reducing overdose deaths and that innovative approaches involving many perspectives were needed. The HOPE Initiative provided an opportunity for partners from law enforcement, criminal justice, public health, treatment and persons in recovery to gather and create a program customized for the Staten Island community. The initiative not only provides hope to program participants in avoiding the criminal justice system and providing opportunities for engagement, but it also serves as a model that partners across many agencies can work together to be responsive to community needs. We are thankful to District Attorney McMahon for his vision and leadership in establishing HOPE and congratulate all of the partners on this anniversary as we celebrate the lives saved and improved by this program.”

**Diane Arneth, Executive Director, Community Health Action of Staten Island,** said, “Community Health Action of Staten Island salutes the visionary leaders and partners in the HOPE initiative who are helping drive dramatic improvements in the health and safety of Staten Islanders struggling with substance use disorder. The focus on providing concrete services that can reduce or eliminate the harms of drug use is a response to this public health crisis which will have real impact.”

**Jacqueline Filis, Executive Director of YMCA Counseling Service,** said, “The YMCA Counseling Service is pleased to be a partner in the District Attorney’s HOPE Program. Countless individuals are struggling with addiction and suffering in silence; the criminal justice system is in a unique position to bring some of those struggling out of the darkness. The HOPE Program provides the opportunity to assess each person’s distinct circumstances putting them on a path of recovery which is a win not only for the person struggling but their family and the community as well.”

**Donna Mae DePola, President of The Resource Training & Counseling Center,** said, “Christophers Reason thanks not only the DA but all the partners that have worked tirelessly to help our community. The HOPE program not only has saved lives but has helped bring all of Staten Island treatment services working together as one to hopefully make a difference. One life saved is worth the lifelong struggle these individuals are experiencing. As we celebrate the year of the HOPE program we realize there is much more work to be done. We at CR are hopeful at the outcomes we are seeing. Being open 24/7 and spending time with these individuals we believe there is hope in the HOPE program.”

###