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Opioid crisis: Mahoney turns attention to treatment, will hold public hearing Oct. 5 in Uniontown.

As I look around this summer and see other elected officials in the local newspapers stating their concern over the opioid abuse and heroin use crisis that's crippling our area, state and nation, I'm left to wonder: where were they in April and May of 2015?

More than a year before anyone else went public in a big way, I was holding a House Democratic Policy Committee hearing with my fellow state legislators and a Town Hall meeting, trying to get everyone's attention about this growing epidemic.

At both events, we heard from recovering addicts and their families, who detailed their horrific experiences in dealing with a societal problem that ruins lives, wrecks families, strains our criminal justice system and social services, and puts too many of our young people in an early grave.

While others try to impress you that they've finally grasped the magnitude of the problem, I'm focusing on doing something to fix it. That's why I'm bringing the Policy Committee back to Uniontown on Wednesday, Oct. 5, for a public hearing on opioid and heroin treatment and prevention.

We'll be meeting from 10 a.m. to noon at Uniontown City Hall, and hearing from people who are in recovery on the best ways to help people get and stay off the stuff. We'll also examine the most effective ways to prevent people from getting hooked in the first place.

I've heard people describe this illegal drug scourge as a war, as though they're warning us that it's time to suit up and take it seriously. But as a plain-spoken man who pulls no punches, I'm here to tell you, the walls have been breached and the "war" has been lost using current tactics.

In many cases, treatment for opioid addiction now lasts around 30 days, after which the person is sent back out on the street. But it can take much longer than 30 days to end an addiction, so the person ends up relapsing – and winds up right back in the same ineffective treatment program. Talk about a vicious cycle.

We need to go back to the drawing board and develop new, effective strategies if we're going to prevail in this war. It may be more costly in the short term, but our treatment approach has to involve more than just giving addicts a daily substitute fix and sending them on their way.

I hope to see you on Oct. 5 if you're looking for better answers, as I am. And that goes for other officials who might want to get up to speed instead of lagging behind the curve.



Fighting the battle against opioid addiction

This fall, a special legislative session will be called to specifically address this issue. It's about time.



At least seven Pennsylvanians die every day from a drug overdose. We clearly need to develop more effective strategies to combat this crisis.

Though we need to do more, some things have already been enacted by the legislature:

- Act 191 of 2014 created a program to ensure that information on potentially harmful prescription opioids could be collected and monitored by appropriate authorities, and allows law enforcement to monitor physicians who may be over prescribing;

- Act 139 of 2014 allows law enforcement and emergency responders to administer naloxone – the life-saving drug that can reverse opioid overdoses – as well as “good Samaritan” immunity for those responding to and reporting overdoses;

- Act 80 of 2015 created a pilot grant program for addiction services at state correctional facilities and post-release, relapse-prevention treatments; and

- Act 37 of 2016 allows the state Secretary of Health to add substances to the controlled substances list to keep pace with the designer drug trade.



Rep. Mahoney accepts a flood relief donation from Laurel Highlands and professional basketball legend Gus Gerard, at the Aug. 5-6 drive conducted at Mahoney's Uniontown office. Donated items were used to replenish the flood-damaged Fayette County Community Action Food Bank and sent to hard-hit West Virginia.

Expanded wine sales, improved convenience on tap

The House this spring passed and the governor signed into law legislation that would allow the sale of wine in restaurants and grocery stores, and make the sale of wine more convenient for Pennsylvania consumers.

I voted for the legislation because it will modernize rather than dismantle a state-store system that annually delivers millions of dollars to help balance the state budget – and provides nearly 5,000 good-paying jobs to Pennsylvania residents, with the potential to create more jobs.

Act 39 of 2016 will give the Liquor Control Board more flexibility to set competitive prices, offer discounts and set state liquor store hours in ways that are better and more convenient for consumers. It also will permit the direct shipment of wine by licensed producers to consumers at their homes.

And, the measure is projected to increase state revenues by almost \$150 million in the fiscal year that began July 1.

Pennsylvanians could see wine in grocery stores, select restaurants and hotels by Thanksgiving.



Deadline extended for Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program

The application deadline for the popular Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program has been extended to the end of the year – and my district offices in Fayette and Somerset counties can help you file for free!

Stop by any of them to find out if you qualify, and to get help applying for rebates on 2015 property taxes or rent.

The Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program is available to eligible Pennsylvanians 65 or older; widows and widowers 50 or older; and people with disabilities 18 or older. Homeowners are limited to a \$35,000 maximum annual income, while renters' income may be no more

than \$15,000, although applicants may exclude half of Social Security income.

The maximum standard rebate is \$650. The program is supported by the Pennsylvania Lottery and from slots gaming revenue.

Applications are available online through the state Department of Revenue at www.revenue.pa.gov, or by calling 1-888-222-9190.

Since the Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program's 1971 inception, older and disabled adults have received more than \$5.9 billion in property tax and rent relief.

Time to expand seniors' prescription coverage

With my support, the state House of Representatives has unanimously passed legislation that would expand prescription drug coverage to over 32,000 older Pennsylvanians by increasing income eligibility guidelines for the PACENET program.

It's been more than a dozen years since the PACENET income limits have been increased. By updating the income limits, we can ensure access to affordable prescription drugs and help thousands of senior citizens maintain their quality of life.

House Bill 2069 would increase the annual maximum income limits in the PACENET program to \$31,000 for a single person and to \$41,000 for a married couple.

Current maximum annual income limits for the PACENET program, which covers those individuals with incomes exceeding PACE maximums, are \$23,500 for an individual and \$31,500 for a married couple.

The PACE and PACENET programs offer lower-cost prescription medications to qualified residents 65 or older, thanks to roughly \$200 million a year in funding from the Pennsylvania Lottery. Advancing this measure will bring even more live-saving medicines to older Pennsylvanians.

H.B. 2069 now is before the state Senate for consideration.

Infant car seats must be rear facing

Children already must be properly and securely fastened in an approved child safety car seat, but a new law, which goes into effect in mid-August, requires children younger than 2 to be secured in a rear-facing safety seat.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that infants should ride in rear-facing car seats, and the American Academy of Pediatrics says a rear-facing seat does a better job at protecting an infant's head, neck and spine because it distributes the force of a collision over the entire body. Now, our state law follows these guidelines, too.



Other aspects of Pa.'s child car seat law:

- Car safety seat – infants to age 4
- Booster seat – children 4 to 8
- Seat belt – children 8 to 17

Remember: failure to do any of the above is a primary offense. That means police can make a traffic stop just for this.



Dakota Wilson, a resident of Smithfield, received a House citation for his success at the 100th Pennsylvania Farm Show, where his livestock was selected as the Grand Champion Junior Market Swine.



Hunter Matthews, a 2016 graduate of Albert Gallatin Area High School, was recognized by Rep. Mahoney for capturing the 2016 PA Golden Gloves Championship in the over-201-pound weight class.



Rep. Mahoney presented Trooper James Pierce with a House citation for being honored as 2015 Trooper of the Year for Troop B. With them is state police Lt. Jeff Fisher.

Kids Coloring Contest and Scholarship Award banquets

Every year at our own expense, my wife Beth and I host a 4th-grade "Welcome to Pennsylvania's Capitol" coloring contest and high school scholarship awards banquet for the 51st District schools in Fayette and Somerset counties. This year's banquets were held April 20 at Morguen Toole Co. in Meyersdale and April 21 at the Ivory Ballroom in Uniontown.

We always enjoy meeting and encouraging the students, each of whom receive a state citation honoring his or her accomplishment. Parents and teachers are invited as well.

Somerset County



Meyersdale



Left: Salisbury-Elk Lick



Fayette County



Albert Gallatin, Laurel Highlands, Uniontown



Turkeyfoot Valley

My offices can help you with...

- Car registrations, special tags, disability placards, titles and driver's license applications
- Information on financial assistance for higher education
- Obtaining and completing state forms of all kinds
- Voter registration and absentee ballot applications
- Unemployment compensation, disability and workers' compensation
- Problems with the Department of Human Services (food stamps, medical and income assistance)
- Pennsylvania income tax questions or problems
- Complaints and problems with insurance companies
- Citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for outstanding accomplishments and family milestones
- Complaints or questions about utilities and the Public Utility Commission
- Renewal of state-issued licenses or certifications
- Property Tax/Rent Rebate problems or questions
- Problems or questions about the state lottery
- PACE cards for senior citizens
- Consumer complaints
- Liquor Control Board concerns or questions
- Tours of the state Capitol for individuals or groups
- Information about federal, state and local government agencies

Any problem with state government!