

Governor Carney Signs Legislation Forming a Behavioral Health Consortium and Addiction Action Committee in Delaware

Georgetown, Del. – On Wednesday, at the site of the future SUN Behavioral Health Hospital, Governor John Carney signed into law Senate Bill 111 and House Bill 220 – bipartisan legislation aimed at curbing the addiction epidemic Delaware faces and improving resources for those struggling with mental illness. [Senate Bill 111](#) creates the Behavioral Health Consortium; an advisory body comprised of community advocates, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, and state leaders that will assess and outline an integrated plan for action to address prevention, treatment, and recovery for mental health, substance use, and co-occurring disorders. [House Bill 220](#) creates the Addiction Action Committee and has the specific charge of making recommendations on a strategic approach to address and monitor the addiction crisis.

The two pieces of legislation were sponsored by Senator Bryan Townsend and Representative David Bentz and passed the General Assembly with unanimous support. Lt. Governor Hall-Long has been the leading force behind the two pieces of legislation and has been tapped by Governor Carney to Chair the Consortium and lead Delaware's efforts on improving behavioral health services. The creation of the consortium and coordinated plan is a recommendation of Governor Carney's [Action Plan For Delaware](#).

“Every day I receive phone calls from families with loved ones who are struggling with addiction, mental illness, and

sometimes both. They often don't know where to turn." said **Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long**. "With the creation of the Behavioral Health Consortium and the Addiction Action Committee we are going to reduce barriers, improve services, and ultimately save lives. We believe Delaware can one day be a national model for other states to follow."

"Delaware families are affected every day by the disease of addiction," said **Governor Carney**. "These new laws will help us develop short-term and long-term strategies to combat our addiction crisis, and more effectively coordinate treatment and prevention services. The Lieutenant Governor has the experience lead these efforts, and help us make a real difference in the lives of Delawareans and Delaware families across our state. Thank you to Lt. Governor Hall-Long, members of the General Assembly, and all those across Delaware who are working to reduce the toll of addiction, for their leadership on this important issue."

"Mental health is one of the great public health challenges facing Delaware and our nation today," said **Sen. Bryan Townsend, D-Newark**, prime sponsor of Senate Bill 111. "Each year, the public is reminded of the growing scale and gravity of the problem, often because they or someone they know is affected by conditions ranging from clinical depression to substance abuse disorder. About 29,000 Delawarean adults—a population nearly the size of Newark—suffer from a serious mental health problem. While our scientific understanding of mental health is still evolving, the public and private sectors alike need to be a part of the solution. The Behavioral Health Consortium will play a critical role in a collective, collaborative approach to this challenge, and I'm glad to have played a part in its formation."

"By expanding and formalizing the Addiction Action Committee, policymakers will be doing much more than monitoring and addressing prescription drug use. This new committee will be focused on attacking the disease of addiction head-on," said

Rep. David Bentz, chair of the House Health Committee.

“Under this committee, the best minds in the state will have the opportunity to join forces and share their knowledge in the hopes of formulating better strategies in the fight against addiction. Families in Delaware depend on our efforts and it is my hope we can help in any possible way.”

In 2016, Delaware had over 300 opioid deaths, which is a 35 percent increase from the previous year. This year, Delaware has experienced 133 overdose deaths. Many from the service provider community recognize the need for swift action.

“Addiction is a chronic disease and no person or demographic group is immune to its devastating impact. We must take it as seriously as diabetes, cancer, or heart disease,” **said Division of Public Health Director Dr. Karyl Rattay**. “Public Health is pleased to join with the Lt. Governor in this effort as we work to develop and implement a broader strategy to combat addiction in the First State as the Prescription Drug Action Committee evolves into the Addiction Action Committee.”

Not only do families and communities face the addiction epidemic, but many across the State struggle with finding critical behavioral health services, specifically those in Kent and Sussex County. SUN Behavioral Health, the host of the bill signing, will be offering nearly 100 psychiatric beds.

“We are honored that the Governor and Lt. Governor chose the Sun Behavioral Health site to have today's bill signing” **said Jonathan Silver, Vice President of the ONIX Group**, the developer of the hospital. “Having them here shows that at the highest level, our leaders recognize the magnitude of the shortage of mental health services in the State. Governor Carney and Lt. Governor Hall-Long are rolling up their sleeves to help people in need. Having the Psychiatric Hospital, the very first in Sussex County, as a backdrop sends a powerful message about Delaware's determination to combat addiction and

mental health issues in all geographic regions of the State”.

The Consortium and Committee will bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including provider, advocates, and critical governmental agencies to conduct the work. The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services have already launched resources to help individuals struggling with addiction. Please visit the newly updated Help is Here website at www.HelpIsHereDE.com. Individuals who are suffering from addiction can also call DHSS' 24/7 Crisis Hotline to be connected to treatment options. In New Castle County, call 800-652-2929, or Kent and Sussex Counties, call 800-345-6785.