



October 5, 2016

## **Treat the Addiction, Lock up the High-Level Dealers**

Addiction to street drugs is a brain condition that needs treatment. Recent research confirms that we can have more success in making our communities stronger by treating people who have a substance use disorder rather than locking them up. And, we have to do all we can to get more people into treatment. This includes reducing the stigma associated with a substance use disorder, and it begins with the words we use.

We have called people with a substance use disorder names like junkies, crack-heads, dope-heads, addicts, substance abusers and worse. These are people who are our uncles, cousins, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. It creates stigma when we call someone a name that sounds like that is all they are – an addict. Words make a difference – we need to talk about the PERSON with a substance use disorder - a person who is our relative, friend, or co-worker – a person who is struggling with a chronic brain disorder that needs treatment. People with substance abuse disorders can be effectively treated and can enter recovery – with medications like Suboxone for heroin addiction, in combination with behavioral counseling.

But, too often the stigma of using street drugs isolates people and prevents them from seeking treatment. The 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health estimates that of the 7.9 million people who need special treatment for a problem with illicit drug use, only an estimated 1.6 million received treatment in the past year.

We have to work hard to do all we can to reduce the stigma of substance use disorder and get more people the effective treatment that they need to get off of the substances, to make their lives whole again, and to help them to better contribute to our society. With the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, more people have Medicaid or other insurance coverage for medications like Suboxone and for the counselling that will help them in their recovery.

This approach- with treatment - is much more effective, rational and humane than arresting and locking up people who have a substance use disorder.

At the same time, we need to go after the people who bring the cocaine, heroin and other increasingly dangerous substances into our communities, so they will face all of the legal consequences of the dangers they bring. These are the people who need to be arrested, charged, jailed, tried, and imprisoned if convicted, and not as much the people with substance abuse disorders.

Our West Side Heroin Task Force is working hard on these issues and will be hosting a Town Hall Meeting at Loretto Hospital, 645 S. Central Ave, Chicago, on Wednesday, October 26, 2016

from 6:30-8:30 p.m. All are welcome to come to learn more and learn how they can help in this effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford

State Representative-Eighth District