



September 5, 2017

The Heroin Epidemic State of Emergency

I have been working with Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, Nirav Shah, MD, JD, on our state's response to the opioid overdose epidemic for much of the last year. We have held three West Side Heroin Town Hall meetings or press conferences, listening to community members, health experts, and law enforcement officials and spreading the word to the media. This week I filed House Resolution 592, which was drafted and approved by the director in March 2017. Now the work is done and the Illinois Opioid Action Plan will be announced this week. House Resolution 592 will assure that we continue to work on the issue and the West Side is not left out. House Resolution 592 urges Governor Bruce Rauner to declare a State of Emergency in Illinois due to the ongoing heroin crisis and urges the director of the Department of Public Health, Dr. Nirav Shah, to create a comprehensive plan to combat the heroin crisis. It also urges the State of Illinois to fully fund the Heroin Crisis Act.

Director Shah has noted that last year in Illinois, more people died from an opioid drug overdose (due to heroin and prescription opioid pain relievers) than the number of people who died due to all gun-related causes (including homicide, suicide, and accidental shootings). He also noted that more people died from an opioid drug overdose than in motor vehicle accidents. The scope of the problem is huge.

Because the scope of the problem is so large, my resolution calls for the governor to call a State of Emergency in the state, just as President Trump declared the opioid crisis a national emergency on August 10th, implementing the top recommendation from a presidential commission that studied the growing epidemic. The opioid crisis now kills more than 100 Americans daily. The growing toll led Trump to establish a presidential commission which urged Trump to formally designate it a national emergency to help mitigate the damage. Calling the opioid epidemic what it is, which is an emergency, could free up funds to confront the crisis.

This week, Governor Rauner is signing an Executive Order creating the Governor's Opioid Prevention and Intervention Task Force and rolling out the Illinois Opioid Action Plan. We will look hard and carefully at how the plan is implemented, seeing if it can actually make a difference in our communities.

From the federal government to our state to our city to our hospitals to our community clinics, we have some great people working hard so eventually we will hopefully be able to say that we have made a difference in fighting this heroin epidemic and in saving the lives of our friends, neighbors and family members.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District