

Combating the Heroin Epidemic: Allocating Tax Revenue from Medical Marijuana Sales to Fund Substance Abuse Prevention Programs in Broome County

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Thesis

The Broome County Legislature should use the revenue from a future medical marijuana dispensary to invest in a competitive grant program to provide additional funding for substance abuse counseling in Broome County schools.

Background & Context

Communities across New York State have been recently devastated by the ever-growing New York State heroin epidemic. From 2008 to 2012, the percentage of overdose deaths attributable to heroin in New York State has doubled from 13% to 26%.¹ In Broome County alone, the number of deaths resulting from a heroin overdose has tripled between 2011 and 2014, from 13 to 39.² Ranging from ages 17-89, these victims came from all areas of Broome County and represent the county's dire need for drug prevention and treatment programs. To find another source of revenue for heroin prevention programs, Broome County Legislator Jason Garner proposed a resolution to direct all medical marijuana revenue received by Broome County from the State Comptroller to heroin/opioid awareness, education, and/or treatment programs within Broome County. However, the bill was tabled as of September 2015, and timing for the next vote is uncertain.³

Talking Points

- ▶ By allocating medical marijuana excise tax revenue to grants for substance abuse counseling and drug prevention programs, there will be no outside cost to provide these programs.
- ▶ Fund allocations to such programs would help solve the heroin epidemic in Broome County.

The Policy Idea

The Broome County Legislature should allocate the excise tax revenue from medical marijuana sales to invest in an annual amount of funding for a competitive grant program to Broome County Schools. These funds will be used to provide additional funding for substance abuse counseling and prevention programs. The prevention programs should have an educational emphasis on the dangers of opiate and heroin addiction.

Policy Analysis

Colorado's Board of Education grant program serves as an example of a successful system for using marijuana tax revenue to provide drug counseling and prevention programs to young adults. This program provides annual funding in the form of competitive grants to various schools districts that have submitted applications and been approved. The grants were used to hire nurses, psychologists, social workers, and professional counselors to teach the negative effects of substance abuse to students. In 2014, Colorado's Joint Budget Committee allocated \$2.5 million from the medical marijuana excise tax revenue to approved school districts. These grants varied on the sizes of the school districts, and ranged from \$50,000 to \$169,232.⁴ Although data regarding the impact of the program on students is not tracked,⁵ David Rein from the New America School in Colorado states that "there's a great need for having this kind of additional staff" provided by the grant program.⁶

Using the Colorado program as an example, the funding for Broome County's competitive grant program will come solely from the sales on medical marijuana, with no additional funding mechanisms. According to New York's Medical Marijuana Law (S7923/A6357-E), the County will receive 22.5% of all gross receipts of medical marijuana sales.⁷ As stated by Broome County Deputy Executive John Bernado, \$100,00 shall be allocated to the Department of Social Services for general opiate programs.⁸ Thus, the Broome County Legislature should divide the \$100,000 into separate grants for schools in the Broome County Promise Zone. The Broome County Promise Zone is a state program designed to boost attendance and graduation rates in schools while making sure kids and families get the help and services they need to be successful.⁹ Currently, these schools receive only \$416,000 annually from the state through the county mental health department.¹⁰ The Promise Zone schools will then apply for grants to hire health workers to specifically focus on substance abuse programs, with a particular emphasis on the dangers of opiate and heroin addiction. Furthermore, the Broome County Legislature should create a coalition between the Promise Zone recipients and the Broome County Opioid Abuse Council (BOAC) to facilitate the educational programs on opiate and heroin addiction.

Key Facts

- ▶ The Broome County medical marijuana program projected \$850,000 in excise tax revenue. Of that, \$100,000 has been allocated to the Department of Social Services for general "opioid" programs.
- ▶ The number of deaths by heroin overdose has tripled from 13 to 39 in the years from 2011 to 2014 in Broome County.¹¹
- ▶ In 2012, there were 1848 deaths from drug overdose throughout the State, an annual increase of 197(11.9%) from 2008. Deaths from heroin overdoses increased from 215 to 478.¹²

- ▶ The percentage of overdose death attributable to heroin has doubled from 13% to 26%.¹³

NEXT STEPS

The Broome County Legislature should partner with the county's opiate advisory council (BOAC), the Department of Social Services, and Broome County Promise Zone to determine how to reallocate the projected tax revenue funds from the County's medical marijuana sales to fund an annual competitive grant program for substance abuse counseling and prevention.

¹ NYS Senate Democratic Conference, New York's Heroin Addiction Crisis, S. (N.Y.).

² Press & Sun-Bulletin Editorial Board. "Facing up to Broome's growing heroin problem." Press & Sun-Bulletin. Last modified May 1, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.pressconnects.com/story/opinion/editorial/2015/05/01/facing-broomes-growing-heroin-problem/26736387/>

³ Roby, John R. "Broome declines to divert marijuana funds for heroin fight." Press & Sun-Bulletin. Last modified September 17, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/2015/09/17/broome-weighs-plan-fight-heroin-pot-proceeds/32533911/>.

⁴ Robles, Yesenia. "Colorado hands out \$975,000 in pot funds to schools for health workers." The Denver Post. Last modified November 13, 2014. Accessed December 1, 2015. http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_26926069/colorado-hands-out-975-000-pot-funds-schools.

⁵ Wilcox, Katie. "State Data Isn't Specific About Legal Marijuana's Impact on School Students." Rocky Mountain PBS I-News. Last modified February 12, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://inewsnetwork.org/2015/02/12/state-data-isnt-specific-about-legal-marijuanas-impact-on-school-students/>.

⁶ Ibid., "Colorado hands out \$975,000 in pot funds to schools for health workers," 2014.

⁷ Compassionate Care NY. *Summary of New York's Medical Marijuana Law (S7923/A6357-E)*. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.compassionatecareny.org/wp-content/uploads/Summary-of-New-Yorks-New-Medical-Marijuana-Law-Aug-2015.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid., "Broome declines to divert marijuana funds for heroin fight," 2015.

⁹ Coker, Eric. "Making the grade: Promise Zone program to improve quality of education for Binghamton-area children." *Binghamton University Magazine*. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.binghamton.edu/magazine/index.php/magazine/story/making-the-grade>.

¹⁰ Feaver, Christopher. "Education initiative shows great Promise." Press & Sun-Bulletin. Last modified December 5, 2014. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/education/2014/12/05/broome-promise-zones/19971647/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>.

¹¹ Ibid., "Facing up to Broome's growing heroin problem," 2015.

¹² Ibid., "New York's Heroin Addiction Crisis."

¹³ Ibid.