

**FULTON COUNTY VICE CHAIRMAN BOB ELLIS**

FULTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER  
141 Pryor Street, Suite 10024  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303



**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of Commissioners

FROM: Bob Ellis

DATE: June 19, 2017

SUBJECT: Opioid Misuse and Abuse Prevention Steps: **6/21/17 BOC Agenda Item # 17-0482**

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Colleagues, I know that we all recognize the extent of the opiate crisis and the impact that is having on our nation, Georgia and Fulton County. The Board took the decisive action last year of emphasizing, encouraging and providing initial funding for the distribution and use of naloxone by all public safety personnel. Additionally, I know that many of us have taken part in working groups, summits and other events in our respective communities discussing the impact of the epidemic and trying to educate our citizens.

After sitting through a number of sessions and doing much reading and research, a report by NACO really struck me. Essentially, it said that there are so many ideas and potential strategies out there when it comes to combating this epidemic that Counties often become overwhelmed trying to adopt comprehensive strategies. As a result, their efforts are delayed and their impact minimized. The report went on to emphasize that Counties should start with a few strategies that have proven successful and which they have the organizational readiness and capability to accomplish.

What follows are four proposed steps that Fulton County can take that will complement the action of the Board last year with respect to naloxone. These are also the types of steps that have been undertaken with success in other areas of the country. The proposed steps are all centered on prevention.

I welcome any feedback and invite anyone who wishes to join as co-sponsors of the Resolution.

**Response to Crisis:**

- Challenge of Opioid epidemic is complex and overwhelming. It has to involve public safety officials including police and first responders, schools, public health officials, behavioral health and addiction treatment specialists, legislators, and the medical and pharmaceutical industry.

- Solutions need to focus on law enforcement, treatment, and prevention.
- Government response to date has been weighted towards law enforcement and treatment with less focus on prevention.

## **Proposed Fulton Prevention Focus**

### **1. Drop Box Initiative**

- Sales of prescription opioids have quadrupled from 1999 to 2014. During this time, prescription opioid deaths have similarly grown and four out of five cases of heroin addiction start with prescription opioids.
- Friends and relatives are the source of many opiate prescriptions for those who abuse or wind up becoming addicted. Much of that sourcing comes from unused pills which are found in the homes of friends and relatives. The general sourcing of prescription opioids is as follows: own prescription (27%), free from a friend or relative (26%), buying from friends or relatives (23%) or drug dealers (15%).
- Drug take back programs help eliminate a source of supply, allow for proper disposal (drugs flushed can taint water supply), and reduce incidents of other tragedies such as accidental dangerous mixing of drugs by seniors or accidental ingestion by small children.
- Currently, several Fulton cities participate in National Prescription Drug Take Back Day, which takes place twice a year (October and April).
- Through the Sheriff's Department, Fulton has 10 boxes in 8 locations. 385 pounds of drugs were disposed of through the program last year. However, certain locations saw heavy use (North Annex, Fulton Jail Alpharetta Annex, -- over 100 pounds at each location -- and others minimal use (Government Building, Courthouse, and Rice Street Jail, suggesting the need for greater promotion.
- Three cities (Sandy Springs, East Point, and Roswell) have boxes in 3 locations. A survey of local police Chiefs revealed a strong desire from 6 of them to have boxes. The remainder have requested more information to see if they could participate (certain facility requirements must be met to maintain a box).
- Routine pickup for disposal is key for the program to work effectively. A coordinated entity that could collect and deliver to the GBI is critical.
- **PROPOSED FULTON SOLUTION:**
  - **Key Focus: Provide Easier access across County, Promote use of all locations, Add more locations, Develop and support a coordinated pickup for disposal by GBI**

- Save-A-Star (drug disposal box provider) has committed to work with us to provide additional boxes.
- Launch public information campaign

## 2. Crisis Text Line deployed/piloted in Schools

- One of the great challenges faced by youth in crisis (anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, pressure, bullying, substance abuse, physical pain) is that they do not know who to reach out to for help for themselves or a peer or are scared to reach out to someone they know for help. Unfortunately, many turn to drugs, including opiates to seek to ease or escape their crisis and wind up in a worse situation.
- Additionally, if they turn to friends or other adults for help, the friends or adults are not aware of available resources. Knowledge of resources has been identified as a key gap for those in crisis or facing behavioral health challenges.
- We have identified a successful program run and developed by Lake County, Illinois, which is a 24/7 anonymous text-communication system for youth needing immediate mental health assistance for themselves or a friend. Members of the community can send a text message to a dedicated number and receive an immediate response from a licensed clinician while remaining completely anonymous. The anonymity makes it a comfortable place for students to share information and provides a safe outlet for voicing concerns about themselves and others. More than 100 school districts in Illinois and California are successfully using the program.
- After conducting a call with Executive Director Andy Duran, participants from Fulton County Schools, Fulton Behavioral Health & Public Health, Georgia Prevention Project and U.S. Attorney's Office, we've determined that there is great interest in the benefit of introducing this program into Fulton and Atlanta Public Schools
- **PROPOSED FULTON SOLUTION:**
  - ***Introduce Help Line into Atlanta and Fulton County Public Schools***
  - Coordinate meeting with key stakeholders: Andy Duran, key parties within County Management and School Systems to establish what's needed to develop and implement system
  - Determine best means to enter into contract among all parties and funding for service. Initial cost to implement is estimated at \$30,000
  - Execute contract and implement.
  - Evaluate effectiveness of program and determine if it could be replicated County wide for all Citizens.

### 3. Public Education to all Citizens

- While many news stories have been done about the Opioid crisis, much of it has focused on heroin, fentanyl and overdoses and less on education around the dangers associated with opioid pain prescriptions.
- **PROPOSED FULTON SOLUTION:**
  - Declare August or September “Opioid Dangers Awareness Month”
  - Develop a battery of social media posts, videos, etc. that can be shared via Twitter and Facebook by all Commissioners, Elected Officials and employees
  - Encourage participation in social media educational effort by all Cities and School Systems (We supply content & they share thru their media)

### 4. Enhanced Education and Accountability from Medical Providers

The medical provider community has not been an active participant in addressing the Opioid epidemic, and that needs to change.

Governor Deal recently signed legislation strengthening Georgia’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program. The dispenser must electronically submit key information to the state including patient information and drug’s quantity and strength. Failure to comply is a felony and violations include 1 to 5 years in prison, up to \$50,000 in fines, or both.

CDC Research shows that many physicians are not properly trained in the dangers of opioids.

New information from researchers at the University of Pennsylvania published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* has found that nearly half of the opioids prescribed by dentists and oral surgeons to patients who have had dental surgery, like wisdom tooth removal, are never used by the dental patients. Data shows that 79 patients prescribed painkillers ended up with a combined 1,000 pills left over.

According to the researchers at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine, patients are more likely to safely dispose of leftover opioid pills if they are specifically given information about pharmacy-based disposal programs.

Many people aren’t aware that anyone who takes prescription opioids can become addicted to them.

In 2014, almost two-million Americans were dependent on or abused prescription opioid painkillers.

- **PROPOSED FULTON SOLUTION:**

- Fulton County Public Health, in conjunction with resources from CDC and the State to develop training and guidance for Fulton Medical Providers on compliance with new state laws, proper training and implementation of CDC prescription guidelines for opiates
- Fulton County Public Health, in conjunction with resources from CDC and the State to develop educational material that can be distributed to all patients being prescribed opiates

Thank you for your review and consideration of the above. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Bob

cc: Ms. Tonya Grier

1 **A RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING AN INITIAL OPIOID ABUSE AND MISUSE**  
2 **PREVENTION PLAN FOR FULTON COUNTY; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**  
3

4 **WHEREAS**, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has  
5 declared the use of heroin and opioid drugs, including fentanyl, oxycontin, and  
6 hydrocodone, to be a serious public health threat and a growing epidemic with  
7 drug overdoses now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States,  
8 surpassing motor vehicle accidents; and

9 **WHEREAS**, the CDC reports more than 33,000 opioid-related deaths  
10 nationwide in 2015, a quadruple increase since 1999, with an estimated 91  
11 Americans dying daily as a result of an opioid overdose; and

12 **WHEREAS**, prescription opioid overdose deaths in Georgia increased ten-  
13 fold to 540 between 1999 and 2014, placing Georgia among the top 11 states  
14 with the most prescription opioid overdose deaths; and

15 **WHEREAS**, 82 people died due to drug overdoses in Fulton County in  
16 2015, a 20-fold increase from 2010, with data indicating that Fulton County had  
17 11.7 opioid-related overdose deaths per 100,000 residents, more than double the  
18 national rate, but likely an understated estimate as overdose death certificates do  
19 not often specify the type of drug involved; and

20 **WHEREAS**, the CDC estimates that 2 million people are addicted to  
21 prescription pain pills at any given time with more than 227 million opioid  
22 prescriptions dispensed in the United States in 2015, quadruple the rate since  
23 1999; and

24 **WHEREAS**, in Georgia, 7.8 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed,  
25 the equivalent of 1 for every adult; and

1           **WHEREAS**, opioid abuse was estimated to cost the health care industry  
2     \$79 billion nationwide; and

3           **WHERAS**, Fulton County recognizes that the opioid crisis is a complex  
4     epidemic that must be addressed via the work of many disciplines including  
5     public safety officials, public health leaders, addiction specialists, educators,  
6     legislators and the medical community; and

7           **WHERAS**, Fulton County recognizes that much of the effort to tackle the  
8     opioid epidemic has been focused on law enforcement, legislative changes and  
9     treatment and that not enough effort has been placed around prevention efforts.

10          **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board of  
11     Commissioners of Fulton County hereby establishes and adopts an  
12     Opioid Abuse and Misuse Prevention Plan for Fulton County (hereinafter,  
13     “Plan”) to adopt the following measures:

14           (1) funding of approximately \$30,000 to launch a 24/7 anonymous  
15           crisis text communication system modeled on a successful  
16           program (“Pilot Program”) founded in Lake County, Illinois,  
17           which is now used by more than 100 schools nationwide that  
18           offer immediate assistance to youth facing drug addiction or  
19           other crises.

20           (2) the County Manager shall direct the Fulton County Department  
21           of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities to provide  
22           support for the implementation of the anonymous crisis text  
23           communication system.

1 (3) Fulton County will work to introduce the opioid prevention Pilot  
2 Program in Fulton County Schools and Atlanta Public Schools  
3 with a comprehensive campaign to promote a texting hotline  
4 and to inform youth in need that there is a round-the-clock  
5 anonymous resource available during their crisis.

6 (4) data will be regularly tracked on the number of texts received,  
7 the nature of the texts, and Fulton County's response to  
8 determine the effectiveness of the Pilot Program.

9 (5) in addition to the texting initiative, Fulton County recognizes that  
10 the majority of opiate abusers get access to their drugs from  
11 friends and family and, as such, drug disposal and take back  
12 programs can significantly reduce this source of future opiate  
13 addiction, and to address these matters, Fulton County will  
14 coordinate the expansion of the availability of drug disposal  
15 boxes across Fulton County at its own facilities, as well as  
16 police departments across the County to allow residents to  
17 dispose of expired or unwanted drugs.

18 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** a disposal program in Lake County, Illinois  
19 that took in nearly 11,000 pounds of unwanted drugs in 2016 with a street value  
20 of \$865,000 and is deemed successful, will be the model for Fulton County to  
21 seek similar goals with a coordinated effort among law enforcement and the  
22 community.



1           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, Fulton County has declared September as  
2   “Opioid Misuse and Abuse Awareness Month” and will promote efforts to  
3   increase education and awareness of the crisis, the risk of opioid prescriptions,  
4   including a robust social media and digital campaign that will be shared and  
5   participation encouraged across all Fulton County municipalities, schools, and  
6   law enforcement agencies.

7           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Fulton County will work with and  
8   through the Fulton County Board of Health to coordinate with the CDC and other  
9   State and local resources to develop educational sessions and materials that will  
10   be shared with Fulton County health professionals including primary care  
11   physicians, oral surgeons and dentists around CDC guidelines and best practices  
12   for prescribing opioids, more effective use of non-opioid pain management  
13   treatments, patient education and effective compliance with laws relating to and  
14   use of prescription drug management programs.

15          **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Fulton County recognizes that the  
16   measures identified in this resolution are not exhaustive to end this epidemic and  
17   that future actions and steps will be needed, and that Fulton County recognizes  
18   and encourages the ongoing critical efforts of other agencies and groups of  
19   stakeholders that are vigorously pursuing other measures that will work in  
20   conjunction with the measures outlined in this resolution.

1           **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that this Resolution shall become effective  
2 upon its adoption, and that all resolutions and parts of resolutions in conflict with  
3 this Resolution are hereby repealed to the extent of the conflict.

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5           **SO PASSED AND ADOPTED**, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of June, 2017.

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**SPONSORED BY:**

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Bob Ellis, Commissioner  
District 2

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17 **ATTEST:**

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

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Tonya Grier  
Interim Clerk to the Commission

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Patrise Perkins-Hooker  
County Attorney

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