

Supervisor Romaine and Deputy Supervisor Panico Applaud Introduction of "Suffolk Healthy Sober Home Act" by NYS Senator Lee Zeldin

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State legislation would regulate sober homes and set up toll-free hotline for complaints

Farmingville, NY - Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine and Deputy Supervisor/Councilman Dan Panico today applauded the introduction of legislation by Senator Lee M. Zeldin to certify, assist, improve and monitor sober living homes operating in Suffolk County.

The bill is one of the core priorities of the Tri-Hamlet Renaissance Project led by Senator Zeldin. Addressing the Sober Home issue through the creation of statewide legislation is the result of this collaborative bi-partisan, multi-governmental effort.

"For years, unscrupulous landlords have masqueraded as 'Sober Home' operators in an effort to make money, instead of making a difference in the lives of those who are seeking help and rehabilitation," said Supervisor Romaine. "These unregulated homes have plagued communities, diminishing the quality of life for their neighbors, and threatening the health and safety of those living there. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Zeldin and Assemblyman Thiele, and the efforts of Legislator Browning, these homes will finally be regulated by New York State and Suffolk County, and uncertified homes can be easily identified for enforcement action."

"I applaud Senator Zeldin for working to address the problem of what is tantamount to fraudulent and phony sober homes that are nothing more than taxpayer funded money machines for their owners and operators," commented Deputy Supervisor/Councilman Panico. "Far too frequently, well intentioned legislation and aid meant to rehabilitate those in society that need a helping hand, is misappropriated by the shrewd and greedy whose goal is to enrich themselves at the expense of taxpayers, our communities, and those who are legitimately seeking treatment and help to get their lives back together. People deserve to live in clean safe communities and the taxpayer subsidized lawlessness that frequently stems from these overcrowded, and frequently dilapidated homes, will come to an end once the State closes the current loophole that currently allows such homes to ignore some Town building and housing codes, namely maximum occupancy. I once again thank Senator Zeldin and hope that his colleagues in the State Legislature see the wisdom in this legislation to help their communities as well."

According to the legislation, the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), in conjunction with Suffolk County and the Suffolk County Group Home Oversight Board, will establish rules and regulations necessary for the certification and operation of all sober living homes located within Suffolk County.

The bill states that all sober living homes will be inspected prior to certification and during the pendency of their certification. They must operate in accordance with all federal, state, and local building codes. The operators must demonstrate good moral character and have experience working with individuals with substance abuse disorders. Operating certificates can be revoked and operators can be fined if a sober living home ceases to meet the standards established through this legislation or any other applicable state or local county law or regulation.

In addition, the legislation would establish a toll-free hotline to receive and respond to concerns or complaints regarding sober living homes within the county.

Any owner operating a sober living home without proper certification would be fined \$10,000.

"A sober living home is intended to provide affordable, drug and alcohol-free environments for people in out-patient treatment who are working to recover from their addictions," said Senator Zeldin. "The mission of a sober living home is to promote recovery and help these individuals to eventually become self-supporting. In order to meet this mission, residents must be afforded a safe, sanitary, and secure environment. But there are far too many sober living home operators in Suffolk County who fail to provide the atmosphere necessary for residents to be successful. While there certainly are some well-run sober living homes that truly aim to assist those in recovery, many of these homes are often overcrowded, drug and alcohol infested, unsanitary, and incompetently managed. This legislation is designed to ensure that appropriate living standards are being maintained, and establish regulations pertaining to the

operation of sober living homes. In addition, it sets the terms of enforcement of these standards and regulations. I thank all of my colleagues who diligently worked on this effort to produce this important proposal."

Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele, Jr. (I, D, WF-Sag Harbor) stated, "Since my election to the New York State Assembly in 1995, I have always made quality of life issues a priority. While there are existing reputable, supervised and successful sober homes and treatment centers, we need to ensure that all of these facilities are managed properly. I am hopeful that this legislation will end the unscrupulous business practices by those who put the importance of making a dollar before the safety and welfare of clients and neighboring communities. We need to ensure that those in recovery are given the support and sober environment they need to succeed, while being sensitive to community concerns."

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