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Subject: Spotlight: Lt. Governor Rutherford Battles Heroin Epidemic in Maryland

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Lt. Governor Rutherford Tackles Opioid Epidemic in Multi-Pronged Approach

Maryland is strengthening existing laws and creating new responses to crisis

Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford (MD)

Sometimes, the toughest issues to shine a spotlight on are the ones that need it the most. As far too many Marylanders can tell you, the opioid epidemic is a scourge that is tearing families and communities apart at the seams every single day.

Three years ago, when Governor Larry Hogan and I were campaigning across Maryland, we quickly became aware of how widespread opioid addiction had become. Everywhere we went – from our biggest cities to our smallest rural communities – we were shocked by stories of how heroin and opioids were destroying families, overrunning state and local resources, and killing our fellow Marylanders.

Governor Hogan and I committed that once elected, we would do everything we could to treat this epidemic as the true crisis it has become, and save the lives of thousands of our citizens. Since taking office, we have worked tirelessly to live up to that commitment.

One month after taking office, Governor Hogan signed an Executive Order establishing the Heroin and Opioid Emergency Task Force, and appointed me as chair. Our administration has been aggressive and proactive, employing a holistic, three-pronged strategy focused on prevention, treatment, and enforcement.

We've strengthened Maryland's Good Samaritan Law, expanded the [Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](#), and launched a statewide public

awareness campaign, “[Before It’s Too Late,](#)” to encourage parents to talk to their children about the dangers of opioids, and provide information to families, educators, and medical professionals. We’ve trained more individuals under the state’s [Overdose Response Program](#), and enacted legislation to improve patient education, continue vital treatment services, and deliver live-saving Naloxone to families and first responders.

In March, Maryland declared a full-fledged State of Emergency in response to this crisis. We established an Opioid Operational Command Center to break down traditional silos and allow for more rapid and effective coordination between state and local agencies. In addition, we dedicated \$50 million in new funding to provide flexibility and resources to public health and safety professionals.

While we know that we cannot arrest our way out of this problem, we realized early on that we must do more to attack the criminal enterprises that traffic this poison. Last year, we enacted the Justice Reinvestment Act, the most comprehensive criminal justice reform package in a generation, which includes a Maryland RICO statute to help take down drug-dealing criminal enterprises. We also provided funding to install Heroin Coordinators in law enforcement agencies across the state to give us a clearer picture of how these drugs get into our communities.

People don’t always like to talk about this problem, yet the consequences of the opioid crisis are too dire to ignore. It is going to take all of us – federal, state, and local governments, community leaders, faith-based organizations, families, schools, and more – working together, to truly turn the tide of this epidemic and save lives.

[Read More About the Maryland Heroin and Opioid Emergency Task Force](#)

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