

CHRISTINA RAINVILLE FOR STATE'S ATTORNEY

CHRISTINA RAINVILLE'S 21-POINT PLAN TO FIGHT THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

There is no simple or quick-fix for the opioid crisis. We need to leave behind old ways of thinking and failed approaches. In their place, we need a course of action with many parts. Right now, there is no plan at all, and I will change that. When I am elected State's Attorney, I will begin to implement my 21-point plan on my first day in office. Here are the details of my plan and the problems I will work to address.

The problem: Without a dedicated drug docket, drug cases move through the court system too slowly -- sometimes for years -- while addicts do not get treatment and dealers remain out on the street.

The plan:

1. Establish a drug court. Opioid cases are time-sensitive, and these cases will be given the highest priority.
2. In conjunction with the court and the defense bar, aim to have every defendant who is arrested for opioids appear in court within 7 days of arrest, with drug cases on a schedule for resolution within six months.

The problem: Studies show that the number of opioid pills legally prescribed in a community is directly related to a community's opioid problems, including the number of babies born addicted. Vermont has one of the highest rates of opioid-addicted babies in the nation.

The plan:

3. Reduce the number of legally prescribed opioids in Bennington County.
4. Give medical professionals free and immediate access to Vermont's criminal data base, so they can consider as one factor in writing a prescription whether, for example, a patient has a Vermont conviction for selling opioid pills.
5. With the help of Senators Leahy and Sanders and Representative Welch, give medical professionals access to the nationwide criminal database to provide them with information about out-of-state drug convictions, and to reduce the cross-border doctor-shopping that exists in our corner of Vermont adjacent to New York and Massachusetts.
6. Because the Food and Drug Administration recently announced that addicts are intentionally injuring pets in order to obtain opioids from veterinarians, raise awareness among veterinarians, and make sure that suspected cases of animal cruelty are referred for police investigation.

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7. Insure that medical providers (including veterinarians) have access to the resources necessary to get individuals seeking opioids into treatment right away so they do not turn to heroin to replace opioid pills.
8. In conjunction with our Medical Examiners, establish a program similar to the one started by the San Diego Coroner, who reduced opioid prescriptions by 9.7% just by sending letters to doctors who had prescribed opioids to patients who overdosed and died.
9. Establish a voluntary system where patients who recover from an overdose give the State's Attorney permission to write a letter to the prescribing medical professional, and work to get new Legislation to get that authority in the event that consent is not provided.
10. Investigate and consider criminal prosecution if there appears to be a question whether a particular medical professional has habitually violated professional rules or the standard of care in prescribing opioids — as defined by experts in the field.
11. Meet with medical professionals in the community to learn what additional approaches and supports might help to reduce the number of opioid pills prescribed in our community, and what the State's Attorney's Office can do to assist.

The problem: Babies are being born addicted to opioids. Studies show that these children are at a significantly elevated risk of having disabilities and life-long challenges. Our kindergarten class of 2019 in Vermont will have, on average, 5 children of every 100 born addicted.

The plan:

12. Establish a public-awareness campaign about the dangers of mothers becoming pregnant while using opioids, and work with medical providers and people throughout the community to make sure that women at risk are aware of programs to obtain, without cost, long-term birth control that does not require regular maintenance (such as IUD's and hormone treatment).
13. Work with our schools to support their education efforts in this regard.

The problem: People with criminal convictions often become drug dealers because they cannot obtain regular employment with a criminal conviction.

The plan:

14. Work to expunge all convictions for marijuana crimes that would not be a crime today.
15. In conjunction with the defense bar and the court, establish a program for defendants charged with "victimless" opioid crimes — defendants who are only hurting themselves with their addiction — to increase their employment prospects by eliminating the record of their conviction if they agree to treatment and achieve long-term success by remaining drug-free.

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The problem: There is no in-patient treatment facility in Bennington County, and no recovery housing for those who complete their in-patient treatment. Without recovery housing, recovering addicts have two weeks of in-patient treatment, and then are released to the community with no housing option other than to return to the same drug dens they worked so hard to leave. The lack of recovery housing fosters drug use, and the cycle repeats and repeats.

The plan:

16. Obtain an inpatient treatment center in Bennington County.
17. Obtain recovery housing in Bennington County, so recovering addicts can live in a safe, drug-free environment with supports and job training through Vermont's Vocational Rehabilitation Department, increasing the treatment success rate and paying for itself over time.

The problem: We have a generation of children growing up in environments where drug addiction is viewed as "normal" behavior, and a generation of children born addicted.

The plan:

18. Raise public awareness by publicizing the problem. Silence from public officials about the opioid crisis has harmed our community, and "sweeping the epidemic under the rug" with the hope that it will disappear is a failed strategy. For example, in one recent week, there were 12 overdoses in Bennington County (all were revived, and fortunately no one died). This year, the County is tragically on track to exceed the number of opioid deaths that we had last year. The public is entitled to important information like this.
19. Educate our youth about the horrors these drugs bring. Every death, every overdose, every baby born addicted, is an educational opportunity. I will make sure that the truth is made available to schools to assist in educational decisions, and to the community at large so parents can better educate their children.
20. Make available myself and my staff to schools, places of worship, and anywhere else where we can help to educate the young people in our community about the dangers of these drugs.

The problem: The opioid epidemic is a constantly changing, moving target.

The plan:

21. Keep informed of the latest strategies that have proved successful in other parts of the country, and organize regular local community events, throughout the county, to listen to concerns, hear suggestions, and work together to end this crisis. We need to continue to come up with ideas, move on from the failed thinking and approaches of the past, and move forward together.

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