



Michael J. Murphy
City of Milwaukee Common Council

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President Murphy and Council members: Regional summit offers collaborative approach on heroin epidemic

Common Council President Michael J. Murphy and his Common Council colleagues are asking officials across southeastern Wisconsin to collaborate in a regional summit to address the deadly epidemic of heroin use and its many related negative impacts on local communities.

President Murphy said heroin addiction, drug-related crime and fatal overdoses have escalated to the point of a serious public health crisis across the region. For example, he noted the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that Waukesha County had 21 heroin-related fatal overdoses in 2012 and is on pace to match this total in 2013.

“I know good families and solid communities that are being decimated by this deadly epidemic,” he said. “Unfortunately, heroin knows no boundaries and plays no favorites.”

In a letter (**attached**) signed by all members of the Common Council and sent yesterday to local officials across southeastern Wisconsin, President Murphy lays out a case for a regional, collaborative approach to addressing the heroin epidemic.

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President Murphy writes: “Unfortunately, the heroin trade and its devastating consequences do not recognize municipal boundaries. A suburban resident may come to Milwaukee to purchase heroin and return home to fatally overdose on the drug – or vice versa. Robberies, assaults and other crimes related to the buying and selling of heroin often occur in Milwaukee – but can and do occur in suburban municipalities as well.”

Alderman Ashanti Hamilton, chair of the Council’s Judiciary and Legislation Committee, said he is in full support of President Murphy’s regional approach to addressing the heroin epidemic. “Heroin use has had a devastating effect on the City of Milwaukee and surrounding communities,” Alderman Hamilton said. “It is now imperative that we take a regional approach to stemming the impact of this drug – a drug that doesn’t recognize municipal boundaries, socioeconomic boundaries or racial and ethnic boundaries.”

Alderman Terry L. Witkowski, chair of the Council’s Public Safety Committee, said heroin use and other drug use cause “a variety of problems in our community, reaching into home life and impacting schools, parenting, work life and productivity and the community at large.” “The tentacles of the heroin epidemic are causing negative impacts not just on users and addicts, but they are, in fact, far-reaching and have negative impacts on law enforcement and court resources, on community health and safety and on the overall economic health of the city,” he said.

Alderman Robert W. Puente, a retired Milwaukee Police Department captain and vice chair of the Public Safety Committee, said he’s seen firsthand the devastating effects of heroin use on families and the community. “As a former MPD captain, I’ve seen how addicts need to feed their daily habit by stealing first from immediate family members, then extended family, and eventually from the community and local businesses,” Alderman Puente said.

“Once users become addicted, they will do almost anything to get the money or items to obtain the drug, and this can eventually lead to all sorts of criminal activities, including prostitution, armed robbery and even homicide,” he said.

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Alderman Puente said the varying degrees of heroin potency also lead to overdoses, which have put a strain on medical resources because of the difficulty and expense of treatment. “I applaud Alderman Murphy for his efforts to open up a regional discussion about the heroin problem – it is much needed and welcome, in my opinion,” he said.

In the letter, President Murphy concludes by asking respondents to contact his office if they are interested in attending a regional summit on this issue – so he can begin work to arrange such a meeting. “Working together, we can make meaningful progress in confronting and reducing the heroin epidemic in our communities,” he states.

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