



New Hampshire General Court

Chuck Morse
President of the Senate

Shawn Jasper
Speaker of the House

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Legislative leadership emphasizes deliberative, coordinated approach to combat substance abuse crisis

Concord, NH – Today, the New Hampshire Executive Council approved the Governor's call for a special session on substance abuse.

Senate President Chuck Morse (R-Salem), House Speaker Shawn Jasper (R-Hudson), Senate Finance Chair Jeanie Forrester (R-Meredith) and House Finance Chair Neal Kurk (R-Weare) released the following statements in response to the vote:

"We again insist that any legislative action should follow an inclusive, open, and transparent deliberative process and we will conduct this special session through that lens. We will take steps to ensure that a special session includes ample public and expert input, debate, and inclusive review, in order to develop the best possible legislation to deal with these issues in a responsible, comprehensive manner," said Senate President Chuck Morse.

"We had previously told Governor Hassan that we intended to expedite legislation to deal with this crisis as soon as we returned in January. I am disappointed that she has taken this step to bring the entire legislature back to Concord in an attempt to try and hastily push through a solution. What she needs to understand is that we intend to work through the process in a fair and open manner, listening to all stakeholders. A solution to this problem is not something that will be accomplished in one day or even one week. I anticipate the first day will involve adopting rules to allow us to move forward with legislation. At the end of the day, our goal is to do what is right for the people of this state," added Speaker Shawn Jasper.

Senate Finance Chair Jeanie Forrester added, "I continue to be concerned by the out-of-control substance abuse epidemic facing New Hampshire and have been fighting for additional means to address these issues throughout my time as a State Senator. Specifically, in the 2016-17 budget, I fought for additional resources, including a 75% increase in funding for substance abuse that has yet to be distributed due to the delay caused by the Governor's budget veto."

"We are committed to combating the substance abuse epidemic through the legislative process, however, I am concerned by the Governor's proposal that increases spending by \$11 million when we do not know where this funding is coming from, have yet to see the final financial picture from 2015, any measurable results from the 75% increase in substance abuse funding from the 2016-17 budget or how those dollars are being used."

"We need answers on what we are doing today to combat substance abuse issues and a clearer picture of where we are financially and we look forward to the Governor's response. It is going to take a coordinated and strategic effort to fully eradicate this opioid and heroin epidemic and I am committed to working with my colleagues in the House and Senate to effectively address the drug epidemic plaguing our state," Forrester said.

"We need time to work on these bills appropriately, and, as the Governor is aware, we have already dealt with many of these issues in the budget," said House Finance chair Neal Kurk. "The state has to be prudent in making sure that all of the services we already increased funding for are actually being provided to our citizens before we consider new spending. Had the Governor not vetoed the budget, we could have realized benefits of the increased funding months sooner. It is our duty as legislators to do a thorough job on this very important issue, but also in the context of how each proposal affects state finances."

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