



**THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
STATEN ISLAND, NY**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 25, 2018

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY DELIVER REMARKS
AFTER DISCUSSING OPIOID EPIDEMIC WITH STATEN ISLAND FAMILIES**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I'll say a couple of things upfront – certainly say for Chirlane and I, listening to families here on Staten Island who have been through so much – it's very, very moving. We've heard stories before but every time it adds to our understanding of this crisis and what it means. I want to thank all of the people here both the family members and the elected officials, but everyone around this table is in common cause that we are going to do everything we can to address the opioid crisis.

I'm just going to make a couple of specific points and then turn to Chirlane and we'll hear from the Borough President and the DA and I want Michele to speak as well because I really want you to hear her perception of what she and her family went through.

I want to say at the outset though, some sad news today – the passing of Guy Molinari. I just want to take a moment to recognize that he was a political giant unquestionably and someone who fought passionately for this borough. It doesn't matter what your party is or what your philosophy is, you certainly can recognize when someone made a huge impact and Guy Molinari made a huge impact and always fought for this borough.

So, I'm very sorry we've lost him and I want to say to the whole Molinari family, our hearts go out to you and our prayers are with you. I know there's a lot of people on Staten Island today who are grieving with you.

The discussion we just had, you know – I've heard from so many family members over time and each conversation adds something and what I'm hearing so clearly today is the power of having someone you can turn to who has been through the experience. Chirlane just made the point in the discussion that the families need that to get help for their loved one who is suffering from addiction but the families need that for themselves as they're struggling and people here were all very honest about what they went through either themselves or while fighting on behalf of the family member.

Chirlane is a great expert on destigmatizing but I think a big, big message that came out of this gathering was we've got to keep fighting the stigma. We can't save as many lives until we defeat that stigma.

This is a really troubling part of this reality. We're losing lives on Staten Island. We're losing lives all over New York City in part because we're not even acknowledging the problem, family by family, as much as we need to.

And a lot of families have been really, really brave in fighting this disease and coming forward but there's still too many families that don't even yet know how to talk about it or feel like if they talk about it somehow they'll be looked down upon, and that to me is really troubling and it's up to all of us to break through that stigma and just let people know there's – it's a disease. If you have a disease, there should be no shame, you need help, and we want to make sure people get that help.

Very human reality. We, in government, we talk about numbers, we talk about statistics but it always comes down to real people, real families like are gathered here. I just want to say very simply we're going to be at this a long time. The Healing NYC initiative has been growing because the problem has been growing. We're finally starting to see some real hope in terms of a turnaround. We've seen some progress here on Staten Island, thank God, and tremendous efforts from local leaders.

And another thing we're focusing on today – the Department of Health is making some additional investment in a new initiative on the South Shore and it's focused on early intervention for young people who are at risk of falling into substance misuse. And another effort to try and get there early and make a difference early and we are going to keep doing those initiatives and supporting the initiatives of the Borough President and the DA as well. The other thing I want to say and I think my colleagues will speak to this too – everyone is part of fighting this problem. That includes the medical community. You know we, Ann Marie will remember, was with us when we talked about the pharmaceutical companies. They are part of the origin of this crisis but to this day the medical community still has more work to do, to step up and get away from the over prescription of dangerous drugs. And that's a theme we have to keep citing, here and in every part of the city.

With that I want to turn to Chirlane and look, again our First Lady has focused on destigmatizing in host of areas and whether you are talking about substance misuse across the board or you are talking about mental health challenges, the stigma issue is the same. It all interconnects and we are going to be able to make a lot more progress in fighting the opioid crisis as we get a lot more people to feel comfortable about coming forward and that's what the Thrive initiative is so much about. Chirlane, turn it to you.

First Lady Chirlane McCray: I'm so grateful that Ann Marie, Jamie, and Kunz family spent time talking with us today. I think we all learn more with every conversation that we have, like so many families in Staten Island and all around our city they deeply understand the pain and the struggle of dealing with someone who is suffering from addiction. But by sharing their

experiences and talking about what they have gone through, it helps us fight the stigma. We can't do anything about a problem if we can't talk about it. So I thank them for their courage and their time and energy for talking about what is very difficult for all of them still. For any New Yorker who is struggling with substance misuse or anyone who is worried about a loved one, I want you to know that there is always hope and there is always help. We do have a helpline that anyone can call 24/7, speak to someone in your language even, the number is 1-888-NYC-WELL. I'm going to repeat that, 1-888-NYC-WELL. We do have peer counselors available to talk to. I would like anyone who is listening to me today to share that number with someone because there are probably people in your life struggling with this challenge but they don't want to talk about it. But if they have this number and they know that they can call someone and speak in confidence, they can speak anonymously – it would be very helpful to them. So 1-888-NYC-WELL. Please share that number with your friends and family. They also can give you options about peer counseling, about buprenorphine, and help you with options that are available, that are convenient to you. So thank you again everyone for participating in this conversation I really appreciate your help.

Mayor: And one of the things that came up in the conversation was again the particular power of peer counseling. This is something Chirlane has championed. I want to emphasize that would really help everyone in the media in your coverage to both include that number, 1-888-NYC-WELL so people know they can get help. That help can include the peer consoling. And a family that is trying to locate that peer counseling can get connected through that number. There have been days in the last year where almost 1,000 New Yorkers called that number or reached out to that number in a given day. So we have got to keep spreading out there because there is an intensive need, we need people to understand that they can get help through that one help line. Borough President.

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