

## Senator Berger Details Efforts Against Opioid Abuse And GenX Contamination

By Administrator

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By Senator Phil Berger

Senate Pro Tempore

As the opioid crisis rages across the United States, North Carolina has not been spared from the devastating effects of this epidemic. From 1999 to 2016, more than 12,000 North Carolinians died from opioid-related overdoses, and drug overdoses are now the number one cause of accidental death in North Carolina. That is why the steps taken by the General Assembly since 2013 to combat this ongoing problem have been so important. “Every day the misuse of opioids takes a deadly toll on families and communities across our state and country,” said Sen. Jim Davis (R-Macon). “There is no single remedy, therefore every effective resource at our disposal must be deployed against this lethal epidemic.”

Since 2013, the General Assembly has made significant efforts to get Naloxone into the hands of more people across the state to prevent overdose deaths from opioids. The 2013 Good Samaritan law and the clarification to it in 2015 made practitioners and pharmacists immune from civil liability for prescribing Naloxone. Legislation was passed in 2016 that took this protection even further, allowing pharmacists to dispense Naloxone to any person without a prescription and allowing law enforcement to carry it with them. In the last two budgets, the General Assembly has appropriated funds to distribute Naloxone across the state.

In 2017, the Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention (STOP) Act implemented new guidelines for prescribing and dispensing highly-addictive prescription drugs to ensure those medications are responsibly administered and not over-prescribed. It also required universal registration and reporting by pharmacies to detect misuse and diversion while strengthening reporting requirements for prescription transactions. That was followed up in 2018 with the Heroin and Opioid Prevention and Enforcement (HOPE) Act which strengthened law enforcement efforts to fight the opioid crisis by giving them tools to improve drug investigations, increasing penalties for healthcare workers who abuse their power and providing funding for community-based drug treatment services.

The 2018 budget provided additional funding to help with North Carolina’s addiction crisis, setting aside \$6 million for the construction of a new TROSA Facility (Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers, Inc.) in the Triad area and \$1.4 million for a facility-based crisis center in Wilkes County.

Another public health concern that has been at the forefront of many North Carolinians’ minds has been the threat to clean, safe drinking water by the discovery in 2017 of the compound

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GenX in public water supplies, including the Cape Fear River and private wells.

The Republican-led General Assembly passed legislation in 2017 to provide funds to the University of North Carolina at Wilmington to quantify the amount of GenX in the Cape Fear River and determine the impact it could have on public health and safety. That bill also providing funding to the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority and other local public utilities to develop treatment technologies to remove GenX from public water supplies and to monitor whether the treatment works.

The 2018 budget expanded the efforts to combat public water contamination from GenX by setting aside more than \$10 million to provide access to clean drinking water for those impacted by GenX contamination and to fund the state's efforts to address Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances (PFAs) and their threat to safe drinking water. Five million dollars of that funding went to the N.C. Policy Collaboratory, a group of scientists from across the University of North Carolina System that focuses on state environmental challenges, and will be used to create the Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substance Testing (PFAST) network which will determine when and where PFAS can be found across North Carolina. Detlef Knappe, a N.C. State University environmental engineer working with the Collaboratory and one of the researchers who found GenX in Wilmington's drinking water recently said that researchers would not have been able to tackle this problem "without this kind of approach."

"Water quality is not a political issue -- it is a public health issue, and a deeply personal issue to me," said Sen. Michael Lee (R-New Hanover). I am pleased that we were able to leverage the expertise of our university system's world-renowned scientists to research ways to improve and protect our drinking water against GenX and other PFAs going forward."