

This letter is in response to your newspaper publishing an "OUR OPINION" editorial on Sunday, January 28, 2018 entitled "A methadone clinic is not a crime scene."

Let's begin with this question: what do you know about Port Jervis? Clearly, you hardly know nothing about us at all! Except for one public forum about the opioid epidemic in our community, you have been non-existent in this community for at least the last 4 years. You didn't even have the decency to respond to an email that I sent to you back on June 12, 2017 that said how dismayed I was with your paper and their lack of coverage for our Soap Box Derby. This is a kid-friendly event that brings thousands of people to our city each year and there was not one mention of it in your paper. However, now you feel compelled to write about a free or reduced pay clinic that wants come to our city? Your priorities are clearly miscued.

Since you really wrote this article about me, as you mentioned me by name 5 times instead of the great hard working, retired, and/or law-abiding residents of our city, I believe I can counter your assessment. Let's begin with your assertion that there are a multitude of drug dealings that happen on our city streets. See, we don't have people hanging out in parks and on street corners just selling illegal substances like many other cities. If they try here, they will get arrested here. We actively encourage and have a lively "If you See Something, Say Something" attitude. Our police are very proactive and do not tolerate loitering. Yes, drugs are bought and sold in every municipality in our country and here, I'm sure, is no different. It's usually a honk of a horn for someone to come out of a house and deal with a car passenger or by car to car exchange. Again, its short lived because our residents watch out and let our officers know. See, you wouldn't know that because you have never been "on the streets," especially here in our city. I will say that the Port Jervis Police Department (and you can certainly look up these numbers) are one of the most proactive police departments in our county when it comes to investigating the sale of narcotics and have the highest conviction rate usually with simple guilty pleas by far.

Now, let's talk about the deaths you discussed in this "Opinion." Of course, Wallkill and Newburgh would be ahead of Port Jervis in opioid-related deaths. That is because the majority of Wallkill's deaths are listed at 70 East Main Street the largest hospital in the county, Newburgh's are at 70 Dubois Street the 2nd largest hospital in the county, and ours are at 160 East Main Street the 3rd largest hospital in the county. So where do these patients come from that die here at 160 East Main Street? They come from New Jersey as far as Sussex, Pennsylvania as far as Blooming Grove, lower Sullivan County, as well as all of western Orange County. Sometimes, these patients even come by private autos from places further away; "shhh" so that nobody where they live knows what happened. The 15 deaths here are incredibly sad, but they come from a huge area.

As far as a treatment plan? Numbers, percentages, and statistics can be skewed in many different ways depending on the presenter's angle. The bottom line is that methadone, suboxone, and vivitrol are not a cure. They are the "now" answers to what our highly educated medical field have come up with and what our government has thrown our taxpayers money towards, but still there is no cure. How about detox, education, testing, and counseling? Nope, I'm told "it's too difficult" or "too expensive." Besides, you state that today's type of treatment plan is "well-established and a successful part, that give those already addicted a chance to get away from that criminal element." Tell that to the family who just lost their loved one last week in Mount Pocono, PA who died from a Methadone overdose sold to him by a man who got it from his clinic. Or tell it to family members here in Port whose loved ones died the same way, as it was sold to them illegally from seller(s) who obtained it from a clinic "that heals them."

Let's discuss Cornerstone coming to our city. I have never said "No." I said put it in a medical facility, especially one with detox and mental health. I want to help our people, who need and want help. According to Cornerstone, that number is between 50-80 in the 12771-zip code (which really includes the City of Port Jervis, parts of the Town of Deerpark, Town of Greenville, and Town of Minisink). Unfortunately, they can't even guarantee us that our residents in need can get treatment here if Cornerstone comes here. They want to fill 200-250 slots. Let's do the math: take their lowest number of slots (200) and our highest number of people in need that they say for the zip code (80); if even all of our people got in, there would still be 120 patients coming into our city from afar every day. Now, that doesn't mean every single one of the 250 to be treated are illegal drug users. Some of them may need to be taken off of a doctor's prescribed pain medication; however, many of them are from heroin. This leads me to my concern: your boast that I am making the situation more dangerous. Well, my dear sir, it's called Mens Rea, or the guilty mind of criminal intent,

and then acting on that criminal intent is Actus Reus. The majority of Cornerstone's clientele are heroin addicts. Heroin is illegal. Just ask any 10-year-old and they can tell you that. Therefore, these patients not only have Mens Rea but also Actus Reus and those are the people I don't want invited to our city, really for any reason. Now, again I will assert that your math is wrong. By their own admission, Cornerstone and Orange County, say we have 50-80 people in our zip code that are in need of this clinic, so that would mean that residents from the City of Port Jervis, by itself, would be even less. In mathematical terms this means that our city would have a daily influx of nearly 2% of our population with a criminal mind that has also acted on it. Where are they coming from?

The east-west notion of putting a clinic in Port Jervis is really only a shadow of the truth of helping people in this end of the county. It's really all about the money. Surely Cornerstone, the non-profit, will show a loss but how much money will their administrators, doctors, and healthcare workers make when the market opens up and they can supply "assistance" to clients in New Jersey and Pennsylvania? That's right: this is taxpayers' money at work.

Folks, this clinic proposal is clearly not about curing people, it's about money. I wish I had the magic wand to cure people, I wish there was no crime, I wish we could make the drug epidemic go away, but it's all impossible. Certainly not the way it is being addressed now. Is "manageable" the way people should get through their life? What needs to be done is true impact education of our students from K-12, detoxification, daily testing, and counseling of those that have used and want to stay drug free. There needs to be stiff incarceration sentences with long prison terms, for even first offenders for those that sell illegal drugs. To me, this sounds like a good start.

A clinic with 200-250 slots here in our city is just another drop site. The idea that people might believe that "Nobody cares about Port Jervis" is wrong. There are nearly 9,000 people or more that love our community, even if at times we disagree on how to go about things. Therefore, I pose this idea: if the "decision makers" on a methadone clinic really want to help OUR people get healed, then open a clinic for the 50-80 people that reside in the 12771-zip code here at our hospital and then we will see that you really want to help.

As far as your assertion regarding alcohol being more of a detriment when it comes to criminal activity, that is an assertion that can be made in every community in America since before prohibition. The problem is nothing has really been done to correct that issue except to make production and consumption legal again and then stiff incarceration and/or fines for what society doesn't accept.

In closing, I'm not opposed to a clinic here, but I certainly want it to help those who truly want help that live here. I believe it needs to be out of our downtown and out of our residential neighborhoods. I am opposed to your assertion that it is crime free and good for the community. Additionally, if you are the true author of this piece, then you would know that there are multiple sides to every story and for telling it one sided, I say shame on you. If you are not the author, I'm sure I have just struck a nerve to that person who is in it for personal and/or financial gain. Now I end with this: if it is so helpful and if there are needs in every community, why isn't there one in your community or those who have commented from the county and/or Cornerstone?

Remember, our citizens buy your paper too.

Kelly B. Decker
Mayor, City of Port Jervis, New York