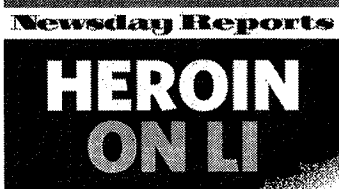


Detox for youth

- **Two bills** would allow parents to check in minors
- **Would also** require insurers to cover treatment

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Parents will be able to mandate their minor children into detoxification treatment under two bills winding their way through the state legislature.

The bills, introduced in the Senate by Sen. Brian X. Foley (D-Blue Point) and in the Assembly by Assemb. Ginny Fields (D-Oakdale) would also require insurance companies to pay for detoxification treatment as part of their regular health care coverage.

"Detox is, in many ways, a very important first step to get a child off drugs," said Foley, adding he expects the bills to be passed this session. "We need to empower parents to help their children."

Foley's and Fields' actions stem from a grassroots effort

started last year by the Sachem PTA and Sachem AWARE — a consortium of educators, legislators and community members. A resolution passed at the state PTA convention in November provided momentum for the bills to be presented to the state legislature.

"This is very exciting for us," said Denise Dolan, assistant principal at Sachem High School East and a founding member of Sachem AWARE.

Currently, parents cannot force a minor child into a detoxi-

fication program, and minors can sign themselves out any time. Under the new law, a parent would be able to petition a family court judge to intervene. The judge could order the child, under warrant, to be evaluated by a treatment specialist, and if the evaluation proves detoxification is necessary, the child could be forced to comply.

Carolyn Reinach Wolf, an attorney in Lake Success specializing in mental health and substance abuse law, said the bill would help parents but that, practically speaking, a child has to want the help to get well.

In general, she said, parents have the right to require their children to accept treatment for traditional medical diseases, such as cancer. The proposed law giving parents the right to require detoxification parallels mental health laws that allow parents to petition the court to mandate treatment, according to Wolf.

Still a gaping hole, experts say, is the lack of detoxification facilities for minors on Long Island.

Heroin use has exploded on Long Island in the past several years, especially among young people. Last week, a 21-year-old woman was charged with manslaughter after prosecutors said she was high on heroin when she killed an 11-year-old girl crossing a street in Smithtown last November. At least two Smithtown highway employees were recently accused of selling heroin on town property. Statistics from the Suffolk County medical examiner show there have been 227 heroin-related deaths from 2006 to December 2009, and one out of every 10 have been under 21. The youngest was 14.

The bills — both of which are called "Denise's Law" in memory of Denise Gerardi, a former Sachem student who died of a drug overdose — have bipartisan support.

"You can't help but notice that we have a very critical problem with heroin," Fields said. "The next thing, we need to be able to have facilities for these kids to be treated."