Governor and First Lady to join Local Leaders at Event to Solve Central Florida's Opioid Crisis

Project Opioid is bringing together local business and faith leaders on Tuesday morning to create "The New Front Line" for those struggling with opioid addiction in the community.

ORLANDO, Fla. (**Aug. 19, 2019**) – More than 400 Central Florida leaders from the business, faith, nonprofit, criminal justice, government and health care sectors will convene on Tuesday, 8:30 a.m. – 10 a.m. for the "Hope for the Crisis" meeting. Held at First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, the event will address the current opioid epidemic in the region, calling on business and faith leaders to take action. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and First Lady of Florida Casey DeSantis will be attending as special guests to help galvanize community leaders on the issue.

"Hope for the Opioid Crisis" will inform attendees about the scope of the challenge Central Florida faces, the need for the expansion of programs serving those struggling with opioid abuse, and details of Project Opioid's community program entitled "The New Front Line." The program seeks to solicit and train business and faith leaders to reach members of their teams or congregations who are struggling with the deadly prescription drugs, before it is too late.

"It could be an employee of your business, the regular church-goer, or even your own family member – this epidemic does not discriminate," said Andrae Bailey, founder of Project Opioid. "There are thousands of Central Floridians suffering in silence from prescription pain pills, and at a crisis level never seen before; we must act now." Bailey started Project Opioid in January of this year with seed funding from the Florida Blue Foundation.

The event will feature presentations from many community leaders including Seminole Sheriff Dennis Lemma, Red Lobster national CEO Kim Lopdrop, Dr. Joel Hunter, First Presbyterian Church of Orlando Pastor Dr. David Swanson, Nemours Children's Hospital President Dana Bledsoe, and Florida Blue CEO and President Pat Geraghty. It will also hear testimonies from those who have suffered or lost loved ones in our region, due to opioid drugs.

"Opioids have become a public health crisis in our country. As with most major issues in health care, real change demands collaboration. You must bring together likeminded partners from a variety of places to work together," said Florida Blue CEO and President Pat Geraghty. "That's why events such as this— where business and faith leaders are coming together—are critical to effect change in our communities."

Seminole County Sheriff Dennis Lemma added - "the business community and faith-based organizations across Central Florida will play a vital role in combatting this drug epidemic. Project Opioid will be important in bringing these groups together." In addition to serving as co-chair of Project Opioid, Sheriff Lemma was recently appointed chair of the State Opioid Working Group and is chair of First Lady Casey DeSantis' new Drug Abuse Prevention Panel.

Following the meeting, there will be a training session for business and faith leaders to learn about and receive *NARCAN®*, a life-saving drug credited with saving hundreds of individuals in Central Florida each year. After the session, there will be an opportunity for press to interview the community leaders who are a part of Project Opioid.

For more information and to register to attend this free event, please visit hope-for-the-opioid-crisis.eventbrite.com.

For more information about Project Opioid, please visit our website: www.projectopioid.org
For logos and photos available for media use, please visit: https://bit.ly/2H9w1C9

Project Opioid *was founded in early 2019 to address the largest public health crisis to date, in Central Florida. The organization brings together local leaders of every sector to uncover and implement real solutions, putting an end to the epidemic in the region.*