

Progress in Cleaning up the Drug Rehab Industry

In July 2016, our office established a task force into abuses in the drug treatment industry, including “sober homes.” Sober homes are group residences designed to help recovering drug and alcohol addicts, including those attending outpatient treatment programs, transition back into the community. Unlike drug treatment centers, sober homes are unregulated, which is why they are proliferating throughout our residential neighborhoods. Because there is no regulation or oversight, there is no accurate count of how many exist. Government officials who seek to regulate sober homes through local ordinances or zoning laws have been thwarted by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Act (FHA).

Florida’s recovery industry is now estimated at over \$1 billion, and Delray Beach is ground zero, with hundreds of rehab facilities and sober homes within city limits. Illegal kickbacks, insurance fraud and patient brokering are among the abuses within the industry. All of this fuels the growth of sober homes, some of them being operated by unscrupulous individuals who encourage drug use and other illegal activity. As a result, otherwise peaceful residential neighborhoods are degraded, public safety is endangered and the recovering addicts themselves are victimized and risk death by overdose.

That’s why we moved full steam ahead with a law enforcement task force to investigate and prosecute illegal activity in Palm Beach County’s recovery industry. Since July 2016, the task force has made 85 arrests. We also impaneled a Grand Jury that convinced Google to change its advertising practices for drug treatment centers. In addition, we were successful in passing important legislation in this area, as our recent bills to tighten marketing and referral standards, along with improved oversight of treatment facilities, are now the law in Florida – and model legislation for the rest of the country.

Our crackdown on rogue sober homes and corrupted drug treatment centers led to an approximate **40% decrease** in opioid overdose deaths in Palm Beach County in 2018, compared to 2017. We believe that most of the corrupt providers have been arrested or have fled the county, but we know that there’s still more work to do.

Anonymous tip? Call our Sober Homes Task Force Hotline at 1-844-324-5463.