WCAX – August 3, 2015
Hassan, Shaheen to discuss funding heroin, opioid prevention
LACONIA, N.H. (AP) - Police and judicial officials are joining Gov. Maggie Hassan and U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen to address cooperation at the federal, state and local levels to deal with heroin and opioid abuse in New Hampshire.

They've scheduled a Monday morning news conference in Laconia with a focus on funding prevention and treatment programs in the federal and state budgets.

Scheduled to join Hassan and Shaheen are Laconia Police Chief Chris Adams; Judge James Carroll of the Laconia District Court; Jack Wozmak, Senior Director for Substance Misuse and Behavioral Health; and Superior Court Chief Justice Tina Nadeau.

NH Union Leader – August 3, 2015
Mayor to governor: Declare heroin epidemic an emergency
By PAUL FEELY
Manchester Mayor Ted Gatsas has sent a letter to Gov. Maggie Hassan asking her to declare a public health state of emergency over the heroin epidemic in the Queen City and the rest of the state, similar to one she issued in 2014 over synthetic cannabinoids known as “spice.” The request, signed by Gatsas, was sent Friday after discussions with Manchester Police Chief Nick Willard, Fire Chief James Burkush and Manchester Health Director Tim Soucy.

The letter also asks Hassan to consider using $2.5 million in appropriation funds — which must be returned to the federal government if not used by Oct. 1 — to fund a drug court in Manchester. “I think, given the problem we are facing, the option of using the funds for a drug court should at least be looked at,” Gatsas said Sunday night. “I spoke to the governor, and told her this crisis is something we should put our arms around and do everything we can to fight.”

The request comes less than a week after more than 400 people attended a heroin forum sponsored by the Manchester Police Department, where it was revealed that 47 people have died of heroin doses in the Queen City since Jan. 1. “While we recognize, and appreciate, that many efforts are underway that focus on both the short- and long-term, I believe that a greater sense of urgency is needed,” writes Gatsas. “At this point in time I am asking that you declare a Public Health Emergency, just as you did with “spice” nearly a year ago. This will further raise visibility surrounding the issue and mobilize any additional resources consistent with an emergency declaration.”

A declaration of a State of Emergency by the governor would trigger the Department of Health and Human Services public health powers under RSA 21-P:53 or any other applicable statute to investigate, isolate or quarantine and require the destruction of the commodity in question — in this case, heroin. Such a declaration would remain in effect for 21 days unless terminated earlier or extended by further order.

While Hassan’s declaration in 2014 regarding “spice” gave the state’s Department of Health and Human Services the power to investigate, quarantine and require the destruction of “spice” products, some of which were sold in stores, it’s unknown what effect a similar declaration would have regarding heroin, because the drug is already illegal. On Sunday night, a spokesman for Gov. Hassan said the most
important step officials can take to combat the heroin crisis is to expand substance abuse programs in the state.

“The heroin and substance abuse crisis is the most pressing public health and safety challenge facing our state, and Governor Hassan is working every day with stakeholders at all levels, including state officials, municipalities, health care providers, and law enforcement and public safety officials, to combat the crisis,” wrote William Hinkle, communications director for Gov. Hassan, in an email to the Union Leader Sunday night.

“The single most important step we can take is to continue our bipartisan health care expansion program and utilize those funds to help individuals access treatment and to encourage providers to expand substance abuse programs in our state. Additionally, the governor will continue efforts to implement the senior director for Substance Misuse and Behavioral Health’s initial recommendations, which includes expanding drug courts throughout the state.”

Push for drug court
In his letter, Gatsas pushes for funds for a drug court. “One vital element that is needed here in Manchester is financial support for a drug court,” writes Gatsas. “The benefits of the drug court are proven in other communities. It is my understanding that there is a $2.5 million appropriation that needs to be disbursed by October 1, 2015 or returned to the federal government for the express purpose of battling this epidemic; it is my belief that the drug court in Manchester would be an appropriate place to expend these funds.

“The structure of our emergency management system is such that when an emergency challenges the local community we look to the state for additional help as the next logical step. I believe at this point in time we are at that point and respectfully request that you declare a public emergency consistent with RSA 21-P:53.”

Hinkle said the money Gatsas refers to must be spent in full by Sept. 30, 2015, and not earmarked for certain uses. He was unsure if the funds could be used for a drug court in Manchester. “The heroin crisis did not emerge overnight, and it will take a concerted effort every day with collaboration from stakeholders at all levels to combat this crisis,” Hinkle wrote in an email. “Governor Hassan is working with public health and safety officials and the Department of Justice to determine whether a 21-day State of Emergency will give the state any authority to take additional action to combat heroin and substance abuse that it does not already have. The governor will continue to work with Manchester officials to ensure that the city has the full support of the state in the collaborative effort to fight this epidemic.”

In June, the Hillsborough County delegation turned down a request to use $443,000 of the $4 million county surplus to fund a drug court. More than 300 people died from drug overdoses in New Hampshire last year, the most in state history. In Manchester, the number of overdose deaths is already up 90 percent over 2014, and up 269 percent over 2013, according to figures provided at the forum.

According to Police Chief Nick Willard, in 2014 Manchester police seized 1,314 grams of heroin. As of July, Queen City police had seized 27,086 grams.