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## At Vigils, Anti-Drug Official Urges Citizens to Work with NOPE

**Former Florida drug control director credits NOPE with galvanizing citizens in pressuring lawmakers to adopt new measures for helping those battling addiction. His message came during the third-annual NOPE National Candle Light Vigil in 30 cities.**

By Leon Fooksman

In the battle against drug abuse, citizens have considerable power to influence government in creating new initiatives to curb overdose deaths attributed to the spread of prescription painkillers, a leading anti-drug administrator told thousands attending NOPE National Candle Light Vigil in 30 cities during the last week of October.

Bill Janes, the former director of Florida Office of Drug Control, credited this year's passage of a prescription drug-tracking system in his state in part to NOPE Task Force's grassroots campaign in pressuring legislators to build a database aimed at identifying people addicted to drugs.



"Your support, your advocacy made a difference," he told a crowd of 200 in Boca Raton, Fla, and made similar statements in a pre-recorded message heard in schools, parks and community centers across the country.

The third-annual vigil was held to remember the more than 24,000 people who die of drug overdoses every year in the United States and to focus on overcoming the stigma of getting treatment for hundreds of thousands of addicted to drugs and alcohol.

Narcotic Overdose Prevention and Education (NOPE) Task Force organized the vigils in Florida, California, Maryland, Connecticut, Louisiana, New Hampshire and Ohio to do "everything possible to prevent further tragedies," NOPE's Executive Director Karen Perry said.



NOPE organizers hope the solemn and inspirational tone of the vigils stimulates communities to create NOPE chapters and further the group's anti-drug message in schools, colleges and community centers. The organization has six chapters in Florida, California and Indiana.

As photos of people killed by drugs flashed on projectors during the vigils, speakers reminded their communities about the dangers of misusing prescription drugs and the consequences of trying illicit drugs even once. They told personal stories of suffering from losing children and friends.

Roomfuls of parents, police officers, public officials and advocates then lit candles, bowed their heads in moments of silence and later listened to somber songs performed by high school soloists and choruses.

Janes, the keynote speaker, turned several times to the teenagers in a chorus at the Boca Raton vigil and urged the



crowd to fight for more programs to root out the causes of addiction.

“What this is all about is protecting you,” he said to the youths.

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