

# AG tackles issues at college forum

## Healey address opioid crisis, gun violence

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Special to The Republican

From the opioid crisis to gun violence to criminal justice reform, state Attorney General Maura Healey covered a lot of ground in a forum with students at Holyoke Community College yesterday.

The forum brought together nursing, human services and criminal justice students. The question-and-answer session was moderated by Alex Sanchez, a criminal justice professor.

The attorney general also toured several campus facilities with HCC President Christina Royal and Holyoke Mayor Alex B. Morse.

Healey said the state needs to continue funding and growing institutions like HCC. She said Western Massachusetts has “tremendous opportunities” but still lags in job creation and economic development.

She said the issues at the “top of her list” are dealing with the opioid crisis and protecting consumers, particularly from social media sites sharing personal data with third parties.

Healey said her office filed a lawsuit against Purdue Pharma, a major manufacturer and supplier of opioids. Her office also filed suits against six major pharmaceutical companies.

In 2007, Purdue paid an over \$600 million fine for pushing OxyContin, a powerful prescription opioid. After the settlement, Healey said, the company increased sales visits to doctors. Purdue also sought ways to enter the drug treatment market, especially the treatment associated with opioid addiction, according to Healey.

Healey added the opioid



Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, center, speaks during a forum at Holyoke Community College on Wednesday. Healey was joined by professor Alex Sanchez, left, and HCC President Christina Royal.

(DENNIS HOHENBERGER PHOTO)

crisis cost Massachusetts \$16 billion in 2017. The attorney general promised a rigorous investigation into big pharma.

She said the state has increased access to Narcan, which reverses the effects of opioid overdoses, and has worked to lower overdose rates. The attorney general’s office continues to work in partnership with state and federal law enforcement to crack down on fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that has driven the jump in opioid-related deaths.

“We need to stop addiction where it sets in,” Healey said.

Royal spoke about HCC’s health worker and emergency medical technician programs, which focus on “chipping away at the bigger problem” of opioid addiction. Sanchez said local law enforcement has joined with social service agencies to help addicts at street level.

Healey spoke about gun violence, particularly the thousands shooting victims and suicides. She supports the state’s strict gun laws. Her office sent out notices to all gun dealers about the state’s ban on selling assault-style weapons. She wants more

stringent background checks nationwide, which she said would stem the flow of illegal guns entering Massachusetts.

Royal said HCC continues to work toward providing a safer campus and recognizing the root causes of violence. She said HCC remains an open and welcoming campus.

Healey called for a fairer legal system. She recalled a young man who lost his license due to marijuana possession. Fresh off probation, the man could not get a job or drive.

She addressed high bails that keep low-income offenders in jail pending trial.

“You should not be sitting in jail because you’re poor,” Healey said.

Healey reminded the audience that most prisoners are released back into the community, one where they need life and work skills to survive.

Mark Cody, the president of HCC’s Democrats Club, asked Healey why few corporate executives are seldom prosecuted or imprisoned. Healey said her office pursues civil and criminal cases against people of all socioeconomic backgrounds, including executives.