

# Pinellas mom says budget cuts bad news for fight against pill mills

## Stepson died of prescription overdose

Posted: 01/03/2011

By: Carson Chambers

CLEARWATER - The gray uniform Matthew Serra wore in college is a symbol of discipline and dedication.

Virginia Military Institute is a badge of excellence who those who fight through to graduation day.

But his stepmom says the young man who wore it proudly could not win the battle he had been fighting since high school.

"I was angry at Matthew. I was angry at the State of Florida. I was angry at the physicians," said Serra.

"At that point, we had to just stop and say, what can we do that's going to make a difference?"

Laurie Serra made good on her promise after Matthew died in October 2008 from a prescription drug overdose. She says it all started with a swimming injury in high school.

Serra tells her son's story at Pinellas County Schools. She's taken Matthew's picture to Tallahassee. She teaches about prescription drug abuse.

She did it through a program called N.O.P.E or Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education [www.nopetaskforce.org](http://www.nopetaskforce.org), as well as the help of the State's Office of Drug Control.

But when Rick Scott takes office as Governor, it's one of the first cuts he'll make.

"Removing the Office of Drug Control for me is very, very sad. I know that somebody else will pick up those responsibilities, perhaps the Department of Health, somebody else but everybody is overloaded," said former Hillsborough County Commissioner and longtime pharmacist Rose Ferlita.

Ferlita says the cuts are a blow to those fighting pill mills and prescription drug abuse. Despite law enforcement's efforts, some say Tampa Bay has become the country's drug dealer of choice.

But a new task force in Tallahassee is offering hope. Former State Senator Dave Aronberg told WFTS by phone, he's heading-up that task force.

"We're actually going to get more aggressive on the doctor shopping issue, on the fact that there are absentee doctors who are just letting their prescription pads be used for almost unlimited oxycontin," said Aronberg.

Aronberg says he's confident funding won't be a problem, even though these laws stalled in 2010.

Still Serra worries about others like Matthew who may look strong on the outside, but are losing a battle on the inside.

"Matthew will forever be a part of our family. Even though he's physically not here with us," said Se