



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at Hearing on Combating the Opioid Crisis

Washington, DC – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Health hearing titled “Combating the Opioid Crisis: Helping Communities Balance Enforcement and Patient Safety.”*

Today is the first in a series of hearings meant to address the opioid and substance abuse crisis that is ravaging communities across the country. In my home state of New Jersey, more than 2,200 people died from opioids in 2016 alone. This is a national crisis that is devastating families every day. Simply put, a lot more must be done.

That is why I am utterly confused as to why the Republican leadership has chosen to hold this hearing on a day when Congress is not in session. These are serious issues that deserve serious consideration. I know Chairman Walden was thanking those who didn't go home and stayed, but frankly in my opinion no Member should have to choose to stay in Washington when we are not voting or go home. It is also completely unfair to all the witnesses who have flown here and will likely end up with less engagement by the time their panel ends. I get the feeling that the Republican leadership is just checking the box instead of giving members, staff and stakeholders the time to consider important issues like the opioid crisis.

Last Congress, we took bipartisan action to pass CARA and 21st Century Cures, both of which provided initial investments and steps to addressing this crisis. These laws are expanding access to treatment and providing recovery support services, financial resources to help States take action to prevent the misuse and abuse of opioids, and support the reduction of controlled substances in circulation. I look forward to working to build on these efforts.

The legislative proposals we are examining today strive to address a number of discrete policy problems under the Controlled Substances Act that health care practitioners and law enforcement officials face in combatting the opioid and substance abuse crisis. For example, we are considering legislation from Congressmen Walberg and Dingell that would empower

hospice employees to dispose of unneeded controlled substances after a patient has passed away. Another proposal from Congressmen Costello and Nolan would allow pharmacies to dispense implantable and injectable controlled substances directly to a practitioner reducing the ability for misuse or diversion. We also are considering legislation from Congressman Schneider that would require mandatory prescriber education as a condition of DEA licensure. This would ensure that all providers who treat patients for pain with opioids have training on the best practices for prescribing opioids, early detection of opioid addiction, and treatment and management of opioid-dependent patients.

We will also discuss how we can employ telemedicine in treating those suffering from substance use and mental health disorders, including individual practitioners and community mental health centers and addiction treatment facilities. While this policy holds the potential to expand treatment options for those suffering, we must carefully consider how we can safeguard against further abuse or misuse of controlled substances.

Finally we will consider two proposals that I continue to have strong concerns about. The first is H.R. 2851, which attempts to address the problem of illicit synthetic analogues. The second is a discussion draft that would propose scheduling tableting and encapsulating machines like controlled substances. While I recognize the importance of addressing illicit synthetic drugs and illegal importation of industrial pill presses, both of these proposals would give the Attorney General broad and unprecedented new authority, including criminal penalties, as a way to deter traffickers that fuel our opioid crisis.

I look forward to hearing more from DEA and our witnesses today on these issues, and hope to work with my colleagues to address these concerns so that we can all support legislation that will help to address the opioid crisis.

Thank you, I yield back.

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