

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “Policies to Protect Our Communities from Illicit Drug Threats”

March 26, 2026

After more than two decades of an overdose crisis that have devastated families and communities throughout the nation, we have finally seen signs of progress over the last several years. Overdose deaths declined by nearly 28 percent from 2023 to 2024. This was driven in large part by public health measures from the Biden Administration like expanding access to naloxone and medications for addiction treatment like methadone and buprenorphine. The Biden Administration also increased availability of fentanyl test strips, which can detect the presence of fentanyl in drugs.

This progress is now in jeopardy as federal funding for addiction treatment and overdose prevention is gutted.

While focusing on illicit drugs in our communities, we cannot ignore the chaos the Trump Administration has brought to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or SAMHSA, the agency responsible for addressing the opioid crisis.

The Trump Administration proposed eliminating the agency altogether, but in the meantime, it has slashed substance use and recovery funding and reduced staff at the agency by more than half. Just this January, the agency abruptly cancelled over \$2 billion in grant funding for mental health and substance use treatment, saying that the programs “don’t align” with the Trump Administration’s priorities. The decision was reversed less than 24 hours later, but no explanation was given as to why they were cancelled in the first place.

Congressional Republicans have done no oversight of the dismantling of SAMHSA and are putting forward two bills that would make it even harder for people struggling with opioid use disorder to access treatment. We need a robust SAMHSA, stable funding, and an Administration that prioritizes substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery instead of undermining the progress we have made.

We also cannot ignore the devastating impact the Republicans’ Big Ugly Bill is going to have on people who desperately need substance use disorder treatment. The Republicans’ bill cuts health care by \$1 trillion over the next ten years – the largest health care cut in our nation’s history.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act’s Medicaid expansion, millions more people have access to substance use disorder treatment. This expansion has saved lives. In fact, Medicaid is the largest source of health insurance coverage for substance use disorder treatment services—

and Medicaid expansion is the way that most people with substance use disorder are able to get this critical coverage.

Yet, Republicans' Big Ugly Bill directly attacks them—vilifying people who are eligible for Medicaid thanks to the ACA Medicaid expansion as people who are not deserving and subjecting them to barrier after barrier just to get and keep their health care.

As if that's not devastating enough, in recent months, the Trump Administration and Committee Republicans have been on a state-by-state crusade to scrutinize and cut Medicaid funding for life-saving substance use disorder treatment services. Among the services being cut are peer recovery services, which evidence shows increases treatment engagement, reduces hospitalizations, and improves recovery outcomes.

For example, when the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) acted to withhold about 20 percent of all of Minnesota's federal Medicaid funding in January—a truly unthinkable and reckless action—on its hit list was peer recovery services. Hiding behind stories of bad actors, the Trump Administration didn't act to recover funding for legitimate, investigated instances of fraud—no, it acted to withhold all of the federal Medicaid funding the state receives for peer recovery and 13 other services that help people live healthy and productive lives in their communities.

These Republican actions have real life consequences. Without continued, sustained support for people with substance use disorders, the result is devastating but not complicated: people can't get the care they need, and in the worst cases, they will die because of it.

And with that I yield back the balance of my time.