

Testimony of Representative Tom MacArthur to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Regarding the Heroin and Opioid Epidemic

Members' Day Hearing March 1, 2017
Submitted for the Record February 22, 2017

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As the subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies crafts its appropriations bill for FY18, I strongly urge this subcommittee to remember and take to heart the dire urgency of the heroin and opioid epidemic that is killing over 33,000 Americans every year, and fully fund both the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, and the opioid epidemic response funds authorized by 21st Century Cures Act¹

I have seen this epidemic up close and personal. In Ocean County, NJ – my home county – someone dies of an overdose, on average, once every 43 hours.² My constituents are losing their friends, colleagues, and loved ones to this crisis. I have lost friends, too. And I know that many of the Members of this Subcommittee represent areas devastated by heroin and opioid abuse – they, too, are hearing stories from their constituents who have lost people they love. Perhaps they, too, have lost people themselves. The damage that the heroin and opioid epidemic is visiting on the

¹ CDC data indicates that there were 52,404 U.S. deaths due to drug overdose in 2015, of which 33,091 (63.1%) involved an opioid. See Rudd RA, Seth P, David F, Scholl L. *Increases in Drug and Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths — United States, 2010–2015*. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) 2016; 65:1445–1452. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm655051e1.htm>

² See: “Ocean County may have suffered more than 200 overdose deaths in 2016.” DeOliveira, Dianne. NJ 101.5. January 3, 2017. <http://nj1015.com/ocean-county-may-have-suffered-more-than-200-overdose-deaths-in-2016/>
“New Jersey’s Heroin Epidemic”. Lassiter, Jay. January 8, 2017. <http://observer.com/2017/01/wtf-heroin-pt-1/>

American people is no respecter of geographic or demographic differences. We are all in this together.

As Members of Congress, regardless of party or region, we have all heard the frustration and sometimes desperation of our communities as they struggle to respond to this epidemic. We have seen the dedication of our law enforcement, first responders, medical professionals, and treatment experts as they do their best to fight the swell of substance abuse and overdose deaths. And we all know that they need us to do our part.

As Co-Chairman of the Bipartisan Heroin Task Force, I am very proud of the work that Congress has done to address the heroin and opioid epidemic. With the passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) and the 21st Century Cures Act, we took strong steps forward. But our work on this is far from over, and we owe it to our constituents to ensure the efforts we started last year do not fall by the wayside. Both these landmark pieces of legislation authorized funding to combat this epidemic. I am grateful that the Congress has already recognized the extreme importance of these appropriations by including CARA and 21st Century Cures funding as budget anomalies in both Continuing Resolutions last year. It is critically important that as we look forward to FY18, Congress fully appropriate the funds authorized by CARA and 21st Century Cures.

The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act authorized funding for numerous grant programs, including many under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and Human Services (and under umbrella of this subcommittee's appropriation responsibilities), by which the Department can help states and local stakeholders combat this crisis. Some of the HHS actions authorized by CARA for HHS include grant programs which will:

- Help states access and purchase opioid overdose reversal drugs like naloxone, which has saved countless lives.
- Help states train pharmacists on the how to dispense opioid reversal drugs pursuant to standing orders, which can greatly improve access to these lifesaving drugs.
- Help states establish or improve State controlled substance monitoring programs.
- Help states train First Responders in how to administer opioid overdose reversal drugs.
- Help states, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes that have a high rate of heroin or opioid abuse expand their evidence-based treatment and intervention activities, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and other services.
- Help recovery community organizations to develop and expand their services to the community. These “recovery community organizations” are nonprofits run by people from the community who are in recovery themselves, that use community resources to help achieve long-term recovery success.
- Help states better treat pregnant and postpartum women who suffer from substance use disorders.
- Help states implement and demonstrate comprehensive and integrated initiatives to respond to the crisis, including educational efforts, prescription drug monitoring programs,

These are the kinds of assistance that CARA authorized HHS to give to our communities. Not to mention what CARA authorized in regards to the Department of Justice and other agencies. (And I am grateful to my colleagues on the Heroin Task Force who are testifying to other appropriate subcommittees on those topics.) Our states and local communities badly need this assistance. It is vital that CARA be fully funded in FY18.

Likewise it is imperative that we fully appropriate the remaining funds authorized by the 21st Century Cures Act. That act authorized \$1 billion over FY17 and FY18 to support state responses to the opioid abuse crisis. Congress appropriated \$500 million of that in our CR budget anomaly last year. It is critically important that Congress fully appropriate the remaining \$500 million of these funds. Our state governments and local communities are in urgent need of this support.

One-hundred and forty-four Americans die every day to drug overdoses. Of those, 91 die from heroin or opioid related overdoses.³ Drug abuse is killing our communities, and heroin and opioid abuse is driving the problem. Our communities need Congress to continue to fight for them. On behalf of myself and my Bipartisan Heroin Task Force co-Chair Rep. Ann McLane Kuster of New Hampshire, on behalf of the over 80 members of the Heroin Task Force, and on behalf of all the communities in which our constituents and fellow Americans are being lost and losing one another to this epidemic, I ask the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies to fully fund the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and the 21st Century Cures Act in FY18 as a matter of extreme and urgent importance.

³ "144 a Day: Understanding the Numbers". Addiction Policy Forum. December 23, 2016. <http://www.addictionpolicy.org/single-post/2016/12/23/144-a-Day-Understanding-the-Numbers>