

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Witness Testimony by Orange County, Florida Mayor Teresa Jacobs  
Remarks as Prepared**

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Chairman Chaffetz, ranking member Cummings and members of the committee, thank you for calling this important hearing, and for allowing me to share the deadly impact that heroin is having on the Orange County metro area.

Like many parts of the country, we were initially fighting pill mills. Orange County worked to “outlaw” them, and to provide resources for breaking opioid addiction.

But today, the battle is tougher than ever, as too many prescription drug abusers are able to find an inexpensive alternative: heroin.

The result? Despite Central Florida’s strengthening economy, extraordinary quality of life, and soaring reputation, heroin use has exploded.

In 2015, we had 82 heroin-related deaths in Orange County, compared to 14 in 2011.

The Ninth District, which includes Orange and Osceola Counties, also had a substantial increase, reporting 101 heroin related deaths in 2015, up from 19 in 2011.

Barely a week goes by without more deaths, including 3 overdoses in a recent weekend. Also this month, a suspected foreign drug dealer with six pounds of heroin was arrested at our international airport.

For the good of our community, and especially for young people who simply do not understand the severe threat posed by heroin – including the wildly unpredictable nature of what they might be buying – we are fighting.

Last summer I convened the Orange County Heroin Task Force, and asked our Sheriff to Co-Chair the effort, so we could bring local resources together to address the surge of heroin.

As we began our work, local law enforcement increased joint operations between the Orange County Sheriff's Office, our MBI and the Orlando Police Department, resulting in over 370 heroin-related arrests.

We've also seen an increase in bookings at the Orange County Jail, which is operated by Orange County.

- In 2013, we had 475 heroin-related bookings, and at the end of 2015, we had over 840 bookings, with the majority of those arrested between the ages of 18-44.
- From January 2015 to January 2016, there were approximately 2,000 unduplicated heroin users at our Jail.
- Not surprising, many of their arrests were for petty offenses – unrelated to an actual heroin arrest, but directly related to the treadmill of infractions and jail time that is the norm for so many heroin addicts.
- And tragically, on any given day at Corrections, we will have pregnant heroin users. In 2015, we housed 100 expectant mothers who were addicted to opiates or heroin.

And as you can imagine, our Jail has become a “treatment center of last resort” for too many cases.

Our Task Force concluded its efforts last week, delivering 37 targeted recommendations – from increased bond for trafficking penalties to social media campaigns warning young people about the deadly nature of heroin, as well as ways to fight addiction – including treatment and medically-assisted detox at our jail.

In addition to moving forward with implementation of critical recommendations, we are also working with our partners at the National Association of Counties, as well as HIGH-DAH (HIDTA) and other organizations to identify best practices, from interdiction to treatment.

Already we've learned that while no single solution works, there are some universally effective approaches:

- Enforcement is critical to combating heroin use in our community, but as we heard from our law enforcement partners, *we simply cannot arrest our way out of this problem.* We must address the demand.
- And in a continuation of what we learned with the pill mills, we must be tireless in educating people that addiction **is an illness** – an actual disease of the brain.

- From law enforcement to families, the life-saving drug naloxone needs to be readily available, at a reasonable cost. Standing medical orders for this makes sense.
- We need to increase funding for substance abuse treatment and resources, including detox beds and ambulatory detox.

To save lives, Orange County needs an engaged community, as well as strong partners at the federal and state level.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee.