

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051

MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<http://oversight.house.gov>

**MEMORANDUM**

**May 6, 2019**

**To: Members of the Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**Fr: Majority Staff**

**Re: Full Committee Roundtable Discussion and Hearing on Opioid Crisis**

On **Thursday, May 9, 2019**, the Committee will hold two events on the opioid crisis:

- First, at **10:00 a.m., in room 2247 of the Rayburn House Office Building**, the Committee will hold a roundtable discussion with families who have lost loved ones as a result of the drug crisis;
- Second, at **11:00 a.m., in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building**, the Committee will hold a hearing entitled, “The Trump Administration’s Response to the Drug Crisis, Part II.”

This memo discusses both the roundtable discussion and the hearing.

**I. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

The Committee will hold an informal roundtable discussion with family members whose loved ones have died as a result of drug overdoses. The participants, who are described below, will give brief statements. Select members of the press also may be in attendance.

**A. Kevin Simmers**

Mr. Simmers is a retired police officer who worked in the narcotics division of the Hagerstown, Maryland police force for more than 25 years. In 2013, he received a call from his daughter, Brooke, who told him she had developed an addiction to opioid pain pills and did not know how to break the addiction.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *In Rural Maryland Counties, Communities Fight Back Against the Opioid Crisis*, Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health Magazine (Fall 2018) (online at <https://magazine.jhsph.edu/2018/rural-maryland-counties-communities-fight-back-against-opioid-crisis>).

Struggling with inconsistent treatment and limited treatment availability, Brooke was eventually arrested and incarcerated. In 2015, nine days after her release, she was found dead in her car from a heroin overdose.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Simmers began raising funds to create a facility to provide treatment for adult women recovering from alcohol and substance use disorders. Brooke's House opened in February 2019.<sup>3</sup>

## **B. Mike Cannon**

Mr. Cannon and his wife, Becky Cannon, reside in North Carolina. Their youngest son, Jonathan, began struggling with substance use disorder in his late teens. When the Cannons became aware of Jonathan's addiction, they helped him check into rehabilitation centers twice, but each time, Jonathan left after a few days. During the course of his illness, Jonathan experienced two non-fatal overdoses, but was revived after being given naloxone. Jonathan suffered a fatal overdose at the age of 26.<sup>4</sup>

Since Jonathan's death, Mr. and Mrs. Cannon have worked to help others affected by the opioid crisis. They decided to reveal the cause of his death at his funeral and have continued to speak publicly about their son's addiction in an effort to fight stigma. They founded JCans, a non-profit dedicated to providing treatment and long-term recovery care access for people who struggle with addiction. They also founded ROAR, a group comprised primarily of families affected by substance use who advocate for policy changes that prioritize treatment and harm reduction.<sup>5</sup>

## **C. Shauntia White**

Ms. White is the second of four children born to a teenage mother who struggled with substance use disorder and a co-occurring mental health disorder. She and her older brother were raised by her maternal grandmother, while her two other siblings were in foster care briefly before being adopted.

During her childhood, Ms. White visited her mother in rehabilitation facilities and jails and witnessed the toll that untreated addiction took not just on the affected individual, but on the entire family. Ms. White's experiences led her to pursue a career helping families deal with substance use issues and grief. In 2009, when Ms. White was 22 years old and in her final

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<sup>2</sup> *A Narcotics Officer Ends His War on Drugs*, The Atlantic (Nov. 9, 2018) (online at [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/11/narcotics-cop-loses-his-daughter-heroin-overdose/575425/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/11/narcotics-cop-loses-his-daughter-heroin-overdose/575425/)).

<sup>3</sup> *Brooke's House Opens Doors to Help Heal Women Battling Addiction*, Herald-Mail Media (Feb. 5, 2019) (online at [www.heraldmillmedia.com/news/local/brooke-s-house-opens-doors-to-help-heal-women-battling/article\\_eb44b524-b118-5de4-8d48-976b84c770c2.html](http://www.heraldmillmedia.com/news/local/brooke-s-house-opens-doors-to-help-heal-women-battling/article_eb44b524-b118-5de4-8d48-976b84c770c2.html)).

<sup>4</sup> *A United Front Drug Epidemic Brings Together Wilson Father, Police Captain*, The Wilson Times (Mar. 29, 2016) (online at [www.wilsontimes.com/stories/a-united-front,63217](http://www.wilsontimes.com/stories/a-united-front,63217)); Committee on Oversight and Reform, Interview of Mike Cannon, Father of Jonathon Cannon (May 2019).

<sup>5</sup> *Heroin Lives Here*, North Carolina Health News (Apr. 11, 2016) (online at [www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2016/04/11/heroin-lives-here/](http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2016/04/11/heroin-lives-here/)).

semester of college, her mother overdosed and died on the day she was released from drug and mental health treatment at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C.

Ms. White completed master’s degrees in social work, and human development and family science. She teaches at Washington Adventist University. She has founded Y Social Work, Inc., a non-profit that advocates for social justice within health and human services both nationally and internationally.<sup>6</sup>

#### **D. Bill Sternberg**

Mr. Sternberg, an editor at *USA Today*, is the father of three children and resides in Maryland. Mr. Sternberg’s son, Scott, suffered from opioid use disorder—likely developed after he was prescribed opioid medication while recovering from an operation—and died of an overdose on November 30, 2017.

On September 5, 2018, Mr. Sternberg published an essay entitled, “The Opioid Crisis Hits Home. Mine.” In that essay, he wrote about “the emotional and financial toll” addiction takes on families and addressed many of the stigmas that still surround addiction.<sup>7</sup>

Earlier this year, Mr. Sternberg wrote an editorial urging increased access to medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder, warning, “How many survive and how many die will depend in part on how many receive the best treatment, based on scientific evidence.”<sup>8</sup>

## **II. HEARING**

The Committee previously convened a hearing on March 7, 2019, to examine the National Drug Control Strategy issued by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The present hearing will continue the Committee’s examination of the coordination of national drug control efforts by ONDCP, including efforts to expand access to treatment.

The Committee also will examine the extent to which the documents that were submitted after the Committee’s March hearing provide the information required by law of the National Drug Control Strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> *CRISP Launches #YSocialWork*, The New Social Worker (online at [www.socialworker.com/blogs/social-work-news/crisp-launches-ysocialwork/](http://www.socialworker.com/blogs/social-work-news/crisp-launches-ysocialwork/)).

<sup>7</sup> *The Opioid Crisis Hit Home. Mine.*, USA Today (Sept. 5, 2018) (online at [www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2018/09/05/lost-my-son-opioid-crisis-and-nothing-can-bring-him-back-column/1137093002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2018/09/05/lost-my-son-opioid-crisis-and-nothing-can-bring-him-back-column/1137093002/)).

<sup>8</sup> *These Medications Can Reduce Opioid Deaths. Why Aren’t They Being Used More?*, USA Today (Apr. 2, 2019) (online at [www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/04/02/opioid-use-methadone-buprenorphine-naltrexone-more-save-lives-editorials-debates/3331533002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/04/02/opioid-use-methadone-buprenorphine-naltrexone-more-save-lives-editorials-debates/3331533002/)).

**III. WITNESSES**

**The Honorable James W. Carroll, Jr.**

Director

Office of National Drug Control Policy

**Triana McNeil**

Acting Director, Strategic Issues

Government Accountability Office

**Karyl Thomas Rattay, M.D., M.S.**

Director

Delaware Division of Public Health

Staff contacts: Lucinda Lessley, Michael Castagnola, Courtney French, and Miles Lichtman at (202) 225-5051.