

**Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.
Hearing on “Examining the Growing Problems of Prescription Drug
and Heroin Abuse: State and Local Perspectives”
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

March 26, 2015

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this hearing today on this important issue.

Prescription drug abuse is an epidemic in the United States. We see its effects throughout the country in all of our districts. In New Jersey, we have seen the rate of drug overdose deaths nearly double in the last ten years.

I want to use today’s hearing to understand what we can do to combat this epidemic. We must work together – at the local, state, and federal levels – to expand effective prevention and treatment efforts for opioid abuse.

We need to focus on what works. Research tells us that medication-assisted treatment combined with counseling is the most effective method of treating opioid addictions. Yet throughout the country, many treatment facilities continue to be based in an abstinence-only model that prohibits the use of medication. We need to understand why that is the case and how we can increase access to medication-assisted treatment.

I want to highlight some of the work being done in New Jersey to address the opioid addiction epidemic. In 2013, the New Jersey legislature passed a law to expand access to naloxone, a life-saving medication that reverses the effects of a drug overdose. Nearly 30 states now have such laws.

In my district, Rutgers University was one of the first colleges to offer a residential program for the growing number of students with substance use disorders. In 1988, the University first established the Collegiate Recovery Community to provide a safe place for students in recovery. There are now over twenty such programs across the nation.

Just outside my district, the Raymond J. Lesniak Recovery High School, New Jersey's first and only public recovery high school, opened earlier this year. It serves students who wish to recover from their substance use disorders in a safe environment.

Here in Congress, we took significant steps to expand access to health care for all Americans, including those with substance use disorders, with the passage of the Affordable Care Act. For many addicts, the lack of insurance or the cost of treatment presents an insurmountable barrier to receive the help they need. The Affordable Care Act addresses these problems by expanding insurance coverage and requiring that insurance cover the cost of substance abuse services. This will mean that millions of people will have access to the tools they need to break their addictions.

I also want to speak for a moment in support of the reauthorization of the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting Act – or NASPER. This legislation helps states set up prescription drug

monitoring programs in order to combat prescription drug abuse and supports interoperability of state programs. It is critical that we continue support for this program through federal funding.

I want to thank all the witnesses for appearing before us today. I'm eager to hear about the work you're doing to combat this epidemic.

I yield the remainder of my time to Rep. Kennedy.