

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Brett Guthrie
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
“A Public Health Emergency: State Efforts to Curb the Opioid Crisis”
January 14, 2020**

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair DeGette, for holding this important hearing on state responses to the opioid crisis.

Our local communities are suffering. On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose and opioids were involved in 47,600 overdose deaths in 2017, which accounted for 67.8 percent of all drug overdose deaths. In Kentucky, there were 1,160 reported opioid-involved deaths in 2017.

The Energy and Commerce Committee has been steadfast in its efforts to help combat the opioid epidemic, with both investigations and legislation. Whether it was the Committee’s investigations into the prescription drug and heroin epidemic, opioid distributors, patient brokering, or the major opioid manufacturers – we have continued to ask questions and get answers for the American public.

When it comes to legislation, this Committee led the way on passage of the 21st Century Cures Act, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, and the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act. I was proud to work on all three of

these comprehensive laws, which are designed to combat the opioid crisis through prevention, advancing treatment and recovery initiatives, protecting communities, and bolstering our efforts to fight synthetic drugs, like fentanyl.

This hearing is a critical opportunity for us to check in with states—those that are on the front lines battling the nation’s opioid epidemic—to see how the federal money Congress provided is being allocated and spent, what successes they are having in combatting the epidemic, but also what challenges they are still facing, and what additional authorities and resources could be helpful.

The good news is that each state testifying before us today has seen a decrease in their overdose death rates. Federal assistance is making a difference. In addition, states are creating and implementing innovative approaches to combatting the epidemic. Examples include: expanding efforts to connect people to treatment through EMS and emergency departments; expanding and increasing the availability of naloxone and medication-assisted treatment; increasing non-emergency transportation options to treatment for those in rural areas; expanding neonatal abstinence syndrome treatment programs for pregnant and parenting mothers; and efforts to address workforce issues through initiatives such as loan repayment programs and broadening the curriculum and training in medical schools.

This hearing is a great platform for the states to share how the federal funding has made a difference and what programs are working. Not only is it helpful for us in Congress as we continue to conduct oversight and legislate, but also to the states as they learn from each other about new ideas or innovative approaches that can be implemented.

While progress is being made and some of the overdose death rates are declining, the Director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse, Dr. Nora Volkow, declared this week that this country still has not controlled its addiction problems. Some states are continuing to see a high number of first responder and emergency department encounters due to an overdose. In addition, states are still facing many challenges, including a lack of a qualified workforce and infrastructure, varying requirements and timelines in different federal funding streams, and restrictions on funding, including that some funds have been restricted to opioids, impeding flexibility to address emerging challenges.

In addition to the continued threat of opioids, states are starting to see more instances of polysubstance use and polysubstance overdose deaths, with some states specifically citing stimulants such as methamphetamine and cocaine as a growing concern. Nationally, since late last year, methamphetamine has been detected in more deaths than opioids such as oxycodone and hydrocodone. In 14

of the 35 states that report overdose deaths to the federal government on a monthly basis, methamphetamine is involved in more deaths than fentanyl.

The threats are evolving, and this fight is not over. We want to continue partnering with state and local entities to combat the opioid epidemic, as well as other emerging threats, which is why it's important to not let our foot off the gas. Congress needs to continue supporting the states and this Committee needs to continue conducting oversight of these critical issues.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing from all of you about successes we have had in combatting our nation's opioid epidemic, but also how the threat has changed, what challenges remain, and what more we, in Congress, can do to be partners in this fight.