

Opening Statement

Rep. Gene Green

Health Subcommittee Hearing: “Examining Legislative Proposals to Combat our Nation’s Drug Abuse Crisis”

October 8, 2015

Good morning and thank you all for being here today.

As we know, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared our nation’s prescription drug abuses crisis an “epidemic.”

In 2013, drug overdose was the leading cause of injury death in the United States.

This is a battle we have waged for more than one hundred years, when Congress first passed laws to confront the problems of heroin and opioid addiction.

We are once again faced with the challenges of controlling and combatting this menace that is ravaging communities across the country.

In the past few years, overdose deaths involving opioids increased four-fold, and the number of heroin users almost doubled.

Cases of HIV and Hepatitis C are on the rise.

Despite universal recognition of the problem, our current efforts are not enough to meet the challenges of this crisis.

The drivers of the problem are complex, and there is no single silver bullet solution.

It is critical that we approach this challenge through a public health lens.

Experts have documented serious impediments to widespread access to treatment, including a shortage of substance abuse providers, social and cultural stigmas, and lack of health coverage for such services.

Current research suggests that a combination of medication assisted treatment and behavioral treatments – such as counseling and support services – are the most effective way to treat opioid addiction.

Yet, in 2013, medication assisted treatments were available in only 9 percent of substance abuse treatment facilities.

We know there is a gap in the availability these treatments.

For example, in 2012, 96 percent of states and the District of Columbia had opioid abuse dependence rates higher than their buprenorphine treatment capacity rates.

38 states reported that at least 75 percent of the Opioid Treatment Programs, also known as methadone clinics, were operating at greater than 80 percent capacity.

Today, we are here to examine seven legislative proposals aimed at combatting our country's drug abuse epidemic.

They build upon the hearings this committee has held, and represent various approaches to improving prevention and treatment.

Each is the product of thoughtful consideration and dedication from their sponsors, and I thank my colleagues for their efforts and the Chairman for having this hearing.

It is critical that we give law enforcement, health care providers, and communities enhanced tools to address this epidemic.

We need more resources and a coordinated effort to ensure that evidence-based treatment is available, and diversion is stymied.

The statistics are staggering. The need for action is clear.

Again, I thank you all for being here today and look forward to examining the legislative proposals before this subcommittee.

I yield the remainder of my time to my colleague from Maryland, Representative Sarbanes, the sponsor of the Co-Prescribing to Reduce Overdoses Act.