

**Rep. Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA) Testimony for the Record before the Energy
& Commerce Subcommittee on Health**
“Member Day: Testimony and Proposals on the Opioid Crisis”
Wednesday October 11, 2017, 10:15 AM

Good morning. Chairman Burgess, Ranking Member Green and Members of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony for the record, and thank you for holding this important hearing.

Mr. Chairman, my state of Massachusetts was hit early on and has suffered greatly from this crisis. In the late 1990's, South Boston saw a disturbing uptick in the number of teen deaths, many of which were related to Oxycontin and heroin abuse. At the time, I worked to help establish the Cushing House Recovery Home for Adolescents, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinic in South Boston for teenagers. This initiative was just one of the many that the Commonwealth, at the state and local levels, has undertaken as part of a multi-faceted approach to tackling this problem. Other initiatives include instituting a Prescription Monitoring Program, making addiction treatment facilities and services more accessible, increasing awareness of the scope of the epidemic, working with doctors to reduce the length of time that they prescribe opioids, and supporting innovative intervention efforts to reduce the rate of overdose deaths.

Recent state statistics are showing that we are making an impact, but that we cannot afford to pull back on these efforts. In 2016, 2,107 citizens of Massachusetts died from an overdose. That level was an increase of 17 percent compared to 2015, which saw an increase of 31 percent, and 2014 in which the death toll rose by 40 percent. We cannot be satisfied with only slowing down the rates of death: we must instead double down on the effective and proven initiatives that are saving lives.

This brings me to the concerns I have that the Majority is pushing legislation that will undercut the efforts being undertaken both in my state and across the country. Recent bills to repeal the Affordable Care Act have included provisions that undermine Medicaid, which, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, covers 3 in 10 nonelderly adults with opioid addiction. In addition, these bills would have allowed states to opt out of covering addiction treatment and the mental health services that are necessary to ensure that recovery is sustainable. Legislative actions such as these will only worsen the crisis and threaten the still-fragile progress that has been made so far. Separately, I am also concerned by the recent omnibus spending package that included a cut of \$306 million to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA). These cuts in funding and in coverage will only worsen the epidemic.

Mr. Chairman, our country lost nearly 60,000 of our fellow Americans to the opioid epidemic last year. We must ensure that we are doing everything in our power to provide those families and individuals who are battling addiction with the support and help they need to overcome this destructive disease. In particular, we must ensure that the programs and initiatives that can help them will be funded and available.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.