

Testimony for The Honorable Gus M. Bilirakis, Member of Congress
Member Day: Opioid Crisis
House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health – October 11, 2017

Thank you Mr. Chairman for hosting today's member day to discuss the impact of opioid abuse in our communities.

The United States is in the midst of an opioid overdose epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more citizens died from drug overdoses in 2015 than any other year on record. Of those deaths, six out of ten involve opioids. Last year, an estimated 60,000 Americans died due to drug overdoses, more than all the Americans who died in the Vietnam War. Sadly, 91 Americans die every day due to opioid overdoses. Nearly half of all opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid.

Florida has been in the crosshairs of this epidemic. In 2010, in response to the opioid crisis and Florida's 'pill mill' problem, Florida's legislature enacted statewide tracking of painkiller prescriptions coupled with law enforcement using drug trafficking laws to prosecute providers caught over-prescribing. Within 3 years, Florida saw a decrease of more than 20% in overdose deaths.

Despite this positive trend, opioid abuse continues to plague my district – Florida's Twelfth District. Pasco and Pinellas counties had some of the highest oxycodone-caused deaths—almost 200 in 2014. In fact, my district had the second highest prescription drug death rate in Florida in 2014. In response, I worked last Congress to ensure that Pasco County was included as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), which has enabled law enforcement to receive additional resources to combat the spread of drug-related crime.

Additionally, I invited the head of the Office of National Drug Control Policy to visit my district last year. We toured local facilities and met with law enforcement, key health care providers, patients, and experts to determine the next steps in addressing this problem. I want to applaud the Committee for including my bills, the Medicare Patient Safety and Drug Abuse Prevention Act and PROMISE Act in the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act which passed last Congress. The Medicare Patient Safety and Drug Abuse Prevention Act created a pharmacy and physician lock-in program within Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D. Private insurance was already using this strategy against doctor and pharmacy shopping, and states had adopted it as part of the Medicaid program. This gives CMS the tools to crackdown on this abuse in the Medicare program, and it's important for us to maintain oversight on this program as CMS is developing the rules. Furthermore, the PROMISE Act will increase safety for opioid therapy and pain management by requiring the VA and DOD to update their Clinical Practice Guidelines for Management of Opioid Therapy for Chronic Pain, requiring VA opioid prescribers to have enhanced pain management and safe opioid prescribing education and training, and encourages the VA to increase information sharing with state licensing boards.

As part of the 21st Century Cures Act this Congress, Florida has received over \$27 million in grants to help fight the opioid epidemic by increasing access to treatment and recovery services, strengthening public health surveillance, and improving pain management practices. These critical funds are supporting Florida's all-hands-on-deck approach across the state to curb opioid abuse and save lives.

Now the rise in fentanyl and its various derivatives have presented new challenges to my state. However, we remain optimistic with Florida's recent legislative initiatives including:

- requiring doctors to log prescriptions in a statewide painkiller database by the end of the next business day to curb 'doctor shopping',

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- **and setting aside state funds for medications that can help reduce opioid dependency, most of which will be spent in the state prison system.**

We need to continue to work closely with local law enforcement, medical professionals, addiction treatment specialists, and those impacted by addiction. I am pleased the Administration and this Committee are leading the charge on this critical issue, and I look forward to working together to help save lives and prevent addiction. Thank you and I yield back the remaining balance of my time, Mr. Chairman.