

Rep. Brad Wenstrup (OH-02) Energy and Commerce Member Day on Opioid Crisis Testimony (As Prepared)

Thank you, Health Subcommittee Chairman Burgess and Health Subcommittee Ranking Member Green for hosting this Member Day today. The opioid crisis is affecting each and every one of our districts across the country, so I appreciate the opportunity to come and speak to you today, along with my colleagues, and share with you some stories from Ohio's Second District.

My office recently sent a survey to the constituents of Ohio's Second District, asking them to share their stories and experiences with the opioid epidemic. The results are heartbreaking. We received hundreds of responses – all telling the same stories. I wanted to just read aloud a few of them for you:

One woman wrote: My brother unfortunately became addicted as a teenager. He is a very lucky one at 33 years old he is still fighting every day to stay sober. These drugs have no place in our country, they are ruining our youth, our future.

Another said: My daughter is currently in rehab for heroin addiction; she's destroyed several relationships with various members of our family, I am raising her 18-month-old son and she's been in and out of jail for several years and she's only 27. She's overdosed at least once that I know about and has been physically and emotionally abused by a boyfriend. I am terrified that she won't live to see 30 and that her son will never know the sweet and caring person she was/is when not high.

Another constituent shared: I have 4 boys and 3 of them are struggling with this addiction...the cost of going to a methadone clinic is very difficult...the cost of treatment facilities is too expensive...I am going broke trying to get my children sober.

Clearly, this epidemic is devastating for Southern Ohio, as it is across the country. In one county in Ohio alone, the overdose death rate was 37.5 per 100,000 residents. In another county, 318 residents died of an unintentional drug overdose in 2016. This spring, the Columbus Dispatch reported that at least 4,149 Ohioans died from unintentional drug overdoses in 2016. One local newspaper called the overdoses the "new normal" in that county.

As we search for solutions to this crisis, I hope you'll keep this in mind:

Adams County Sheriff Kimmy Rogers, in my district, is working hard on a key part of this solution: prevention. He runs an after-school program at a local church that teaches young kids about the dangers of drugs and opioids. He also runs an essay contest, asking local students to write an essay about the dangers of opioids and how they hope to become the generation to stop the epidemic. When I asked Sherriff Rogers about these programs, he said *we can't incarcerate our way out of this problem. We can't always treat our way out of this. But I hope we take some time in this process for a long-term vision of how we can prevent people from every getting in this situation to begin with.*

With that, I yield back, and I thank you for your time and attention today.