

The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
Statement for the Record
February 28, 2018

Deaths from drug overdoses have risen in nearly every county across the United States, with 47,055 lives lost each year due to overdose, the equivalent of about 125 people every day.¹ At the same time, more prescription opioids are being dispensed than ever before. In 2010, prescription opioid use in the U.S. translated into 693 mg of morphine per person, nearly doubled from 2007.²

The people on the front lines of the abuse of prescription pain killers are pharmacists.³ Under current law, pharmacists are required to exercise sound professional judgment when making a determination about the legitimacy of a controlled substance prescription. The responsibility to validate the prescription for a specific set of criteria is done with great care and professionalism by hundreds of thousands of pharmacists every year.

The Empowering Pharmacists in the Fight Against Opioid Abuse Act would require the Department of Health and Human Services, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and other federal agencies responsible for combatting the opioid epidemic to produce and disseminate materials to pharmacists, medical professionals, and patients that provide additional guidance on when and how to refuse to fill a prescription that the pharmacist believes to be fraudulent. It simply clarifies the tools that pharmacists already are empowered with and ensures that information about the rules surrounding denying to fill a prescription are readily available for any professional or patient who may need it.

Pharmacists have a difficult job made even more taxing by the rise of this epidemic. This bipartisan, commonsense legislation will help improve the last line of defense against prescription drug abuse in our communities and could have a meaningful impact in combatting the opioid epidemic.

¹ <http://blogs.cdc.gov/nchs-data-visualization/drug-poisoning-mortality/>

² <http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/opioid-consumption-data>

³ http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/mtgs/pharm_awareness/conf_2013/august_2013/prevoznik.pdf