

**Opening Statement of Chairman Walden
Subcommittee on Health
“Combating the Opioid Crisis: Helping Communities Balance Enforcement
and Patient Safety”
February 28, 2018**

No community is immune to the opioid epidemic. It’s ripping apart the very fabric of our neighborhoods. From Oregon to Ohio. From Connecticut to California. Our friends and our families are experiencing an epic tragedy – one that’s claiming the lives of more than 100 Americans each and every single day.

Working together, we can help.

Congress must learn from the past. The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or CARA, was an important milestone in helping states. The breakthrough 21st Century Cures Act – striking a fair balance of speeding up the availability innovative treatments and safeguarding necessary public health protections – is already delivering.

Lawmakers must acknowledge the present. In 2016, opioid overdose deaths – from both prescription and illicit drugs – were five times higher than in 1999. And as public officials representing our communities, we must plan for the future. This is why we’re here today – to work towards our shared goal of combating the opioid crisis.

Each statistic is disturbing. Even more tragic, every number has a name.
Like Mike.

At a roundtable I held in Oregon, a man named ‘Mike’ showed up. Literally, he just showed up. Mike didn’t know anyone in the room. He’d heard of our meeting to discuss opioid abuse on the news and wanted to share his story.

Mike’s son was injured in a school sporting accident, and he became addicted to the prescription painkillers provided by his doctor to aid in his recovery. Eventually, Mike’s son made the all-too-familiar transition to a cheaper opioid source: heroin. To this day, Mike's son still struggles with his addiction that began with opioid abuse.

Mike went on to speak about his sister who also suffered from addiction. A nurse, Mike commented that she found herself with easier access to the pills. When coworkers and others caught on, she moved and continued to procure pills elsewhere.

Sadly, Mike’s sister died as a result of her addiction. Mike came to the meeting – a roundtable I held with law enforcement and medical professionals – in hopes that sharing his stories could help ensure it doesn’t happen to other families.

Mike, and the countless other folks who have fallen victim to this crisis, is the reason we're here today.

Today marks our first of three legislative hearings this Congress. We'll focus on equipping law enforcement with the necessary tools to fight the opioid epidemic with careful attention to not compromising important public health protections.

Getting illicit synthetic drugs off the streets, safely disposing of unused controlled substances, improving patient access to substance use disorder treatments and remote services, and helping providers and pharmacists better prevent addiction are among the handful of bills we'll review today.

It's important to acknowledge that this legislative hearing is the appropriate venue to ask tough questions and make constructive suggestions on how to improve these bills. Many of these bills are discussion drafts because they are admittedly in need of discussion. I look forward to feedback from each of our witnesses as well as both the Democratic and Republican members of this subcommittee.

In the coming weeks, this subcommittee will continue its hard work with legislative hearings related to public health and prevention efforts, as well as issues pertaining to insurance coverage. This is just the beginning and represents only a

fraction of the ideas members from across the country have formulated to overcome this epidemic.

I'd like to thank our two panels of witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your feedback on these important issues. I'd also like to thank my colleagues for staying in town to have this vital discussion. Combating the opioid crisis requires all-hands-on-deck, and I appreciate everyone's shared commitment in this effort.