

**Testimony of Congressman Hakeem Jeffries on H.R. 449 the “Synthetic Drug Awareness Act of 2017” before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
“Combating the Opioid Crisis: Prevention and Public Health Solutions”
March 21, 2018**

Chairman Burgess and Ranking Member Green, thank you for holding a hearing on the opioid crisis and for considering my bill, H.R. 449.

H.R. 449 addresses a critical and sometimes overlooked threat, the use of synthetic drugs by teenagers. It requires the Surgeon General to prepare a report on the public health effects of synthetic drug use by 12 to 18 year olds in America. With the information this study will provide, Congress can work to prevent substance abuse by younger Americans through an enhanced and enlightened lens.

It is not news that the opioid crisis has ravaged families across the country without regard to zip code, income, race, religion or gender. However, this public health emergency is now taking hold of our nation’s youth. Nationwide, the drug overdose death rate has more than doubled during the past decade among younger Americans. Many experts believe this troubling phenomenon results from the rise and availability of potent and dangerous substances like illicit fentanyl—a substance that can be 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine—and other synthetic drugs.

Teenage fentanyl use is a vicious cycle: adolescents have a still-developing prefrontal cortex, which can facilitate drug-seeking behavior. The drug then alters the development of this area of the brain, making that behavior permanent. The majority of adults who develop a substance abuse disorder begin using before they are 18 years old. In order to address the multifaceted public health crisis, we must consider both the cause and effect.

H.R. 449 has significant support among Republicans and Democrats and has been incorporated into the legislative agenda for the Bipartisan Heroin Task Force. Furthermore, a number of health and patient advocacy groups are supportive of this bill, including the American

Academy of Pediatrics, American Association of Nurse Practitioners, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, College on Problems of Drug Dependence, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, Friends of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Healthy Teen Network, Mental Health America, National Association of County and City Health Officials and National Association of Police Organizations.

Thank you again for your consideration of H.R. 449. I look forward to working with you to ensure this bill advances from the Energy and Commerce Committee so that it may be considered by the entire House of Representatives.