

Opening Statement of Representative Eliot L. Engel
House Committee on Energy and Commerce—Subcommittee on Health
“Prescription Drug Coverage in the Medicare Program”
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
April 30, 2019

Thank you Madame Chairwoman Eshoo for holding today’s important hearing on Medicare drug pricing. Nearly 130,000 of my constituents depend on this vital federal health program for drug coverage.

A growing share of the program’s expenditures are going to prescription drugs. According to the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation, Medicare’s share of nationwide prescription drug spending jumped from 18 percent in 2005 to 30 percent in 2017.

While some of this increase was for innovative drugs—which save future Medicare dollars—much of the growth stems from price spikes.

I am pleased that this committee has taken steps in the past to curb Medicare drug spending. The bipartisan 21st Century Cures Act included provisions from my bill to expand access to infusion drugs under the Medicare Part B program. These expanded benefits will give beneficiaries the ability to receive life-saving therapies in the comfort of their own home while avoiding costlier care in institutional settings. These past efforts demonstrate that Medicare can be leveraged to reduce drug costs.

My constituents are outraged that the 2003 Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act, which I voted against, contains the so-called “non-interference clause.”

This horrendous policy prevents Medicare from using its clout to negotiate lower prescription drug prices.

Empowering Medicare to do so would bring immediate relief to hard-working American families, who often are being forced to choose between filling life-saving prescriptions or purchasing groceries.