

**OPENING STATEMENT FOR THE HONORABLE BRETT GUTHRIE
REPUBLICAN LEADER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH**

April 14, 2021

**Legislative Hearing on: “An Epidemic within a Pandemic: Understanding
Substance Use and Misuse in America”**

As Prepared for Delivery

Chair Eshoo, thank you for holding this important hearing today.

It is devastating that we have lost more than 550,000 Americans due to COVID-19. Sadly, we have another epidemic that has claimed around the same number of American lives over the past two decades: the opioid crisis. We’re hearing from public health providers that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis. The CDC recently reported over 81,000 overdose deaths over the past year ending in May 2020, which is the highest number of overdose deaths in a 12-month time. In 2019, addiction and substance use disorders affected over 20 million Americans, 10 million of which experienced opioid misuse. Last year, we sadly saw that number increase even more. According to the CDC, we have had three waves of the opioid epidemic. First, we saw the rise in prescription opioids, then in 2010 we began to see a rise in heroin and currently we are in the third wave, which includes the rise in synthetic opioids which often includes deadly forms of fentanyl.

My home state of Kentucky has seen some of the highest numbers of substance use disorder deaths. One Kentucky substance use provider group that my

office spoke to shared that they have lost more patients to overdose during the pandemic than they have in the last five years. CDC compared the death by drug overdose rates over a 12-month period between August 2019 and August 2020. In August 2019, Kentucky had 1,307 overdose deaths. One year later that number was up to 1,874. Unfortunately, Kentucky is not alone with these increases.

This committee has worked in a bipartisan way to authorize many programs to decrease overdose deaths, but more work needs to be done. Specifically, the Energy and Commerce Committee authorized: the 21st Century Cures Act, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, and the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act to combat the opioid epidemic. Included in the final SUPPORT Act was my bill, the Comprehensive Opioid Recovery Centers Act of 2018, which authorized the creation of comprehensive opioid recovery centers throughout the nation. This program is currently being implemented and provides evidence-based comprehensive care for those with substance use disorders. Overall, these laws continue to provide critical funding and authorizations to help address substance use disorder treatment, recovery, and prevention. I think it is important for us to look back and fully examine these laws and evaluate where we are and where we are headed. And while we have 11 new bills before us today, we must also examine current authorizations.

One of these current authorizations is the extension of the temporary emergency scheduling of fentanyl analogues. Synthetic opioids, which includes fentanyl analogues, were involved in 744 deaths in Kentucky in 2018. Fentanyl analogues are very dangerous due to their potency and often come across our borders illegally only to harm Americans. Just last month, a two-year-old in Kentucky died from exposure of fentanyl. One health care provider group who treats patients with substance use disorders told my office that almost all their patients have some sort of fentanyl in their system, many of the patients are not aware themselves. I recently heard from another local health care provider in Kentucky who said it is almost rare to have an overdose case with a substance that is pure and does not also have traces of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. This provider also shared that they have had certain individuals using substances in their own parking lot in case they overdose, or anything were to happen because they know the provider is equipped with Narcan. We must protect Americans from these harmful drugs that ruin lives and families.

I look forward to continuing the bipartisan work to combat the substance use disorder crisis in America. I yield back.