

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Health Ranking Member Diana DeGette

Hearing on “Policies to Protect Our Communities from Illicit Drug Threats”

March 26, 2026

Today, we’re considering 14 bills relating to illicit drugs and the crisis in substance use disorder in our country. Thanks to investments made by Congress and the Biden administration, drug overdose deaths are going down.

In late 2023, after climbing since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, overdose deaths started falling nationwide. This is due to a strategy that puts public health first: meet people where they are, provide support, get tools out into communities, and help them beat addiction.

We can’t forget the context in which this hearing is happening: a year of chaos at public health agencies, during which billions of dollars of grants to fight substance use disorder have been slashed, hundreds of dedicated public servants have been fired, and a community of advocates whose only goal is recovery faces existential questions about the support of their government.

Earlier this year, President Trump issued an executive order on addiction. It states “the framework for addiction treatment should parallel that of other chronic diseases — utilizing evidence-based care, scientific advancement, continuous support, and community connection.” I don’t think anyone would disagree with that.

But actions speak louder than words, and the actions we see from the administration and from the majority of this Committee show that they are determined to go the opposite direction.

In a press release following the executive order, it bashed Biden administration policies like getting support out to people struggling with addiction and reducing harm, which are the very policies that have helped bring down overdose deaths.

Last year, driven by the disastrous DOGE, this administration cut \$1.7 billion in block grants administered by SAMHSA that supported exactly the tools described in the administration’s plan.

Blue states, including Colorado, sued and got their funding reinstated. But red states did not, and their funding remains cancelled, leaving their citizens worse off and with fewer resources to address addiction.

And today, many of the bills we are considering simply focus on criminalizing substances, not helping the people affected by the synthetic opioid scourge.

We can't simply schedule, prosecute, and punish our way out of this. We know this—time and time again, we learn, and researchers confirm, that just upping a mandatory minimum fails at its stated goal of deterrence and certainly doesn't help anyone. We need to make sure that communities across the United States have the tools they need to educate, prevent, and treat.

Addiction is a disease. We don't send people to jail for getting diabetes or cancer. We help them and provide them what they need to live a healthy life.

For addiction, that might look like medication-assisted treatment, therapy, housing and social supports, and other help to get life back on track.

One bill we are considering today, H.R. 5629, goes the opposite direction. It rolls back groundbreaking policies to make medication-assisted treatment more available and to help people build and live stable lives while getting treatment.

One of our witnesses, Dr. Olsen, was instrumental in developing those important policies, and I expect that today's hearing will reveal just how counterproductive this bill really is.

I'm glad that at least some of the bills we are considering today are positive.

Tyler's Law will give hospitals guidance on testing for fentanyl poisoning, making sure that clinicians have the information they need to effectively treat overdoses. Tyler's mom, Juli, is here today, and I'd like to thank her for her tireless work to get this policy to where it is.

To build on this and have a more productive hearing, we would consider legislation to reverse the chaotic cuts to federal agencies whose job it is to tackle the overdose crisis and empower communities to take care of people who need it most.

I look forward to this discussion, and I yield back.