

Congresswoman Elizabeth H. Esty
Testimony
Member Day: Testimony and Proposals on the Opioid Crisis
October 11, 2017
3 minutes

- M__ Chair, thank you for holding this hearing on the growing opioid epidemic.

- This epidemic is literally filling the morgues across our country.

- Everywhere I go in Connecticut, I meet people whose families have lost loved ones to drug addiction – moms and dads, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.

- It's an epidemic that affects families and communities across the country - regardless of age, sex, race, or socio-economic status.

- During one of my recent visits to Staywell Oasis, an addiction treatment center in Waterbury, I met a young woman who has a new baby and is so grateful for the help that the program is providing for her.

- She emphasized to me how important Staywell is for her – that the it is is keeping her clean and off the streets so that she can keep her baby.

- Or there's the 45 year old man that I met at Farrell Treatment Center in New Britain who is getting his 20 year battle with opioids under control for the first time.

- These are real people, real families, and real lives that are affected by the opioid crisis.
- And the stakes are high.
- If these vital treatment centers are forced to close their doors, or if we limit access to them, people will die.
- In my hometown of Cheshire, one of my neighbors came to my office pleading for help - they could not find their daughter.
- Their daughter had been battling substance addiction for years.
- The family did ultimately find their daughter, but it was too late.
- She died weeks later without the care and treatment she so desperately needed.
- This is how dire the situation is: in our state, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner actually lost its accreditation because it simply could not keep up with the body count, due to the sharp rise of drug overdose deaths in Connecticut.
- Connecticut's Chief Medical Examiner projected that Connecticut will hit a devastating benchmark this year: more than 1,000 people will die from opioid overdoses in our state alone before the end of the year.
- The medical examiner's office simply cannot keep up with the demand for autopsies on the rising number of people who are dying from drug overdoses.

- Congress needs to act, and it needs to act now, to save lives.
- Instead of finding ways to hire more medical examiners to keep up with the rocketing death toll, Congress needs to work together to come up with commonsense solutions to end this devastating epidemic.
- Last year, I was proud to help write a landmark, bipartisan bill to improve resources for cities and towns to address this crisis and to create new consumer and provider education campaigns to encourage prevention.
- The funding in this bill was not everything our communities need – but it was an important step forward.
- The State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grant program, created by the 21st Century Cures Act, provided \$1 billion over the next two years to states to address the opioid epidemic.
- These grants help support programs for people struggling with addiction at places like the Farrell Treatment Center in New Britain, the Staywell Oasis Addiction Treatment Center in Waterbury, or the McCall Center for Behavioral Health in Torrington, provide life-lines to people struggling with addiction.
- At the same time, we must ensure that the millions of Americans with substance use disorders who currently get treatment through Medicaid expansion are able to continue to get the care they need.
- The recent, misguided efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and defund Medicaid expansion would have cut over \$800 billion

from the Medicaid program, removing access to treatment for low-income people with mental and substance use disorders.

- I am heartened that you have invited me here today to talk about how this devastating epidemic is affecting my district, and I am committed to continuing to partner with my colleagues in Congress to prevent more lives from being taken by the opioid epidemic and to help those suffering from addiction to recover and move forward.
- Thank you.