

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on the Judiciary

Washington, DC 20515-6216

One Hundred Fifteenth Congress

February 14, 2018

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
House Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Goodlatte:

We write to request a hearing to comprehensively examine the ongoing opioid epidemic. In 2016, more than 42,000 people died of opioid overdoses, which equates to 115 people dying every day of preventable causes.¹ On October 26, 2017, President Trump declared the opioid epidemic a Nationwide Public Health Emergency. At the time, you stated that “the House Judiciary Committee will continue to review our nation’s laws to determine if more resources are needed to address this crisis.”² Shortly thereafter, on November 1, 2017, the President’s Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis (the “Commission”) released its final report setting forth 56 specific recommendations to address the ongoing epidemic. It is long past due that the Committee held a hearing to examine these issues and how we can work in bipartisan manner to consider comprehensive measures to combat the opioid epidemic.

Additionally, we are concerned by the President’s FY 2019 budget proposal, which recommends a massive 95-percent cut in funding for the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the agency that would coordinate federal, state and local efforts to combat the opioid epidemic.³ Further, it appears that the President is dismissing the Commission’s recommendations. In a February 5, 2018 speech in Ohio he stated:

People form blue ribbon committees, they do everything they can. And, frankly, I have a different take on it. My take is, you have to get really, really tough – really mean – with the drug pushers and the drug dealers. We can do all the blue ribbon

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Opioid Overdoses*, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>.

² Statement of Chairman Bob Goodlatte, House Committee on the Judiciary, Oct. 26, 2017.

<https://judiciary.house.gov/press-release/goodlatte-statement-president-trumps-public-health-emergency-declaration-opioid-crisis/>.

³ Sarah Karlin-Smith and Brianna Ehley, *Trump again targets drug policy office, proposing 95 percent budget cut*, POLITICO, Jan. 18, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/01/18/trump-targets-drug-policy-office-297422>.

committees we want. We have to get a lot tougher than we are. And we have to stop drugs from pouring across our border.

Since the release of the Commission's report, neither the full Judiciary Committee nor the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations, which has jurisdiction over law enforcement issues related to the opioid epidemic, has held a hearing on the matter. Instead, the Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security is moving forward with a politically divisive hearing, "The Effect of Sanctuary City Policies on the Ability to Combat the Opioid Crisis." We fear that this hearing will merely continue the incessant anti-immigrant rhetoric has been emanating from the Administration and some in Congress.

We would ask you to compare the Judiciary Committee's course of action to that of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. On October 26, 2017, the Energy and Commerce Committee held a full committee hearing, "Federal Efforts to combat the Opioid Crisis: A Status Update on CARA and Other Initiatives," at which Members pressed the Drug Enforcement Agency regarding ongoing investigations into "pill dumping" in West Virginia, which include investigating the shipments of over 20 million hydrocodone and oxycodone pills to two pharmacies in a West Virginia town of 3,000 people.⁴ On December 5, 2017, the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held a hearing, "Examining Concerns of Patient Brokering and Addiction Treatment Fraud;" and, on January 20, 2018, Chairman Greg Walden announced a series of hearings to continue oversight and consider legislation to combat the opioid epidemic.

Like these committees, we should explore the opportunities for bipartisan action on these issues instead of focusing on divisive anti-immigrant politics. Therefore, we request that the full Committee or the Crime Subcommittee convene hearings to address means by which we can do more to prevent and fight opioid abuse in our country.

Sincerely,



⁴ Dana Dovey, *20.8 Million Prescription Painkillers Sent to West Virginia Town with Population of 2,900*, NEWSWEEK, Jan. 1, 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/20-million-prescription-painkillers-west-virginia-town-population-2900-795413>.

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