

**Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper**  
**“Combatting the Opioid Crisis: Exploiting Vulnerabilities in**  
**International Mail”**  
**January 25, 2018**

- Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing today. I appreciate your continued leadership in responding to our country’s opioid crisis.
- No state has been immune from the damage these drugs have caused, including my home state of Delaware. According to our Division of Forensic Science, more and more Delawareans are dying from opioids every year. In 2014, we lost 222 people. In 2015, we lost 228. And in 2016, we lost 308.
- Just last month, it was reported that emergency responders in our largest county, New Castle County, are dispatched to a reported drug overdose every 80 minutes. And by early November of last year, paramedics there had administered Naloxone, a drug that can block or reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, to nearly 600 patients.
- All told, opioids are now the leading cause of drug overdose deaths, killing more than 42,000 people nationwide in 2016.
- Last year, our Subcommittee set out to learn what the federal government is doing to stop these drugs from entering our country. In May, we heard testimony from officials with the Postal Service, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the State Department, in addition to some experts and first responders on the ground in Ohio, Delaware, and elsewhere who grapple every day with the impact opioids are having on our communities. They told us how opioids are getting into our communities through the mail, and how they’re working together to stop it.
- Unfortunately, I left that hearing very concerned that the federal response was proving to be insufficient. Our investigation shows that progress has been made, but also that we have much, much more to do. In fact, our findings are simply alarming.

- We found that fentanyl and other even stronger synthetic opioids are openly available for sale on the Internet, accessible to anyone who knows how to shop online. Once purchased, the drugs arrive primarily from China through the international mail system. While sellers often prefer the Postal Service, they also offer shipment via private carriers like DHL, FedEx, and UPS.
- Through our work, we obtained key payment and shipping data that enabled staff to link online sellers to fentanyl-related deaths and drug-related arrests all over the country. We even found what appears to be a major opioid distributor in Pennsylvania, where Delawareans reportedly get most of their drugs.
- It's CBP's mission, in partnership with the Postal Service and private shippers, to keep these drugs from entering our country. That mission has, unfortunately, become increasingly more difficult as the number of inbound international packages has skyrocketed.
- At the Postal Service alone, volume has nearly doubled, growing from about 150 million pieces in fiscal year 2013 to nearly 500 million in calendar year 2017.
- Until recently, CBP was forced to sift through this massive number of packages from the Postal Service manually. Today, automation and the use of advanced electronic data has improved the targeting of packages that may contain illicit items, but the process is far from efficient and effective.
- Our investigation revealed that a 2015 joint Postal Service-CBP pilot project at JFK airport suffered due to the agencies' differing missions, a lack of coordination, and several inter-agency conflicts. As a result, the pilot's full expansion to our four other international mail processing centers was delayed until just this week.
- In addition, despite the massive amount of drugs coming into our country through the mail, the Postal Service and CBP only target a small number of packages each day. Meanwhile, as our report points out, efforts to get CBP the data it needs to better target suspicious mail items and intercept opioids and other contraband has also not kept pace with the volume of drugs that cross our borders.

- Unlike private carriers who control which packages enter their networks and have more freedom to turn away problem customers, the Postal Service is required to deliver all of the mail it receives from foreign posts. This is due to our country's membership in the Universal Postal Union, or UPU, an international body that sets global mailing standards and ensures Americans can send mail to friends, family, and business partners overseas.
- The State Department represents the United States at UPU proceedings. While the Postal Service has made some progress in obtaining better information on packages through bilateral agreements with foreign posts, the State Department has watched for more than a decade now as some of our foreign partners have successfully fought efforts requiring more information on international packages.
- Given the stakes, it is urgent that the Postal Service and CBP work together to continue ramping up their targeting and inspection efforts, and that the Postal Service and the State Department speed up international efforts to get CBP the data it needs.
- At the same time, those of us in Congress need to ensure that the Postal Service has the resources *it* needs to be a stronger partner in these efforts.
- As my colleagues are aware, protecting and improving the mail system in this country has been one of my biggest priorities on this committee. The Postal Service is vital to our economy. And as our work illustrates, it plays an important role in our fight against the opioid epidemic, as well. Yet it faces insolvency if Congress does not pass comprehensive postal reform. The enactment of this legislation will free up billions of dollars that the Postal Service can use to not only invest for the future, but also to shore up mail security.
- All of that said, if we only focus on chasing drug shipments *after* they've entered our mail system, we'll only address the symptoms of this problem. We also need to focus on the root causes. To truly do that, we must address our country's considerable demand for drugs.
- As we know, health care plays a pivotal role in combatting the addiction that drives drug demand, and Medicaid is the country's single largest payer for substance abuse disorder services. Many states with the highest opioid overdose death rates have used Medicaid to expand treatment access.

- We need to focus even more on making sure that our health care system has the resources it needs to provide quality treatment to those suffering from this epidemic.
- As we consider root causes, it's also clear that we need to engage with China – the biggest source of illicit opioids entering our country – in order to successfully disrupt the supply of fentanyl and similar drugs.
- We did something like this during the Obama Administration through a high-level dialogue on cyber-crime and hacking. Given the success that bilateral partnership had, this Administration should commit, at the highest levels, to a similar effort to tackle this urgent public health crisis.
- This reminds me, Mr. Chairman, of the importance of leadership in addressing complex challenges like the ones we're discussing today. There's no silver bullet that can solve this problem, and none of the agencies represented before us today can do it alone. We need leadership from the top.
- Last March, the President established a commission charged with studying the opioid epidemic and determining how to fight it. And then in October, he officially declared the crisis a public health emergency.
- Despite these high-profile moves, news reports suggest that only a couple of the commission's 56 recommendations have reportedly been implemented.
- Further, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the entity charged with coordinating the federal government's counter-drug response, still does not have a permanent director.
- And recent media reports indicate that the President's upcoming budget will again propose a 95 percent cut in ONDCP's budget.
- On a day when we're going to be critical of some front-line agencies for what appears to be a lack of focus and sense of urgency about a real crisis, I think it's only fair to call out the President too for what appears to be a failure to make that crisis the priority it should be.

- Going forward, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you and our colleagues and learning what we can do now, both to stop drugs from being shipped here to our country and to address the underlying causes of the issues we uncovered in our investigation.
- My thanks again to you and your staff. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.