

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper**

### ***PSI Hearing: Stopping the Shipment of Synthetic Opioids: Oversight of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Illicit Drugs***

**May 25, 2017**

- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing today. I appreciate your continued focus on our country's opioid crisis, which has had deadly consequences for our friends, neighbors, and loved ones in communities across the country.**
- I also appreciate our focus today on learning more about at least one of the ways these drugs are getting into our communities, and what we can do to stop them.**
- I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the first panel to better understand the processes used by the Postal Service, private shippers, and CBP to screen**

**international mail shipments and to identify and stop potentially illicit packages.**

- **I also look forward to learning more about where the coordination between shippers and federal agencies is working well, while identifying areas where we need to push for improvements.**
- **Joining in today's discussion is the Postal Service which, in partnership with CBP, is our first line of defense in preventing the flow of illegal drugs and contraband into our country.**
- **As some of you may recall, protecting and improving the mail system in this country has been one of my biggest priorities as a member of this Committee. The Postal Service is vital to our economy and is the lynchpin of a trillion dollar mailing industry. Yet the agency is facing**

**insolvency if Congress does not act in the coming months to pass comprehensive postal reform.**

- **Doing this will free up billions of dollars that the Postal Service can use not only to invest for the future and improve customer service, but also shore up mail security.**
- **It's worth noting that, despite the financial uncertainty facing the Postal Service, its inbound international package volume has grown significantly in the past three years. In fact, it's nearly doubled, growing from 150 million pieces in 2013 to more than 275 million in 2016.**
- **There's no question that handling this increased volume – in addition to the increase in domestic packages we're seeing – is putting a strain on already stretched resources.**

- Unlike private carriers, the Postal Service is required to deliver all mail it receives from foreign posts in a timely manner. This is due to our membership in the Universal Postal Union, which sets international mailing standards. It also ensures that we can send mail ourselves to friends, family, and business partners overseas.
- The State Department represents the United States at the Universal Postal Union and is also here today to discuss our involvement in this key organization. I look forward to hearing from our Postal Service and State Department witnesses about our commitment to promoting the exchange of advanced electronic data among the Union's 192 member countries as a means of combatting the shipment of drugs and other illegal goods.

- While all packages are screened initially by CBP before being presented to the Postal Service, CBP can, and often does, target packages for additional screening.
- CBP, which is also joining us today, can target packages based on the country of origin or on scans done by the Postal Service. Recently, the Postal Service and CBP have been working closely together on a pilot program that allows CBP to use advanced electronic data on small packages from China arriving at JFK Airport.
- While the Postal Service provides other countries with advance electronic data about mail originating in the United States, we don't always get that same information from other countries. This makes it harder for CBP to do its job as packages arrive here. The pilot program at JFK is a rare exception, so I hope we can learn today

**whether there are any recommendations to improve and expand this program.**

- **Private carriers, like UPS -- which is also joining us today -- already provide CBP with advanced electronic data on packages destined for our country. Unlike the Postal Service, private carriers have integrated, automated systems in locations around the world and can refuse to accept a package at origin that does not contain any shipping manifest data. Hopefully, learning how this process is yielding success in interdicting shipments of illicit drugs can help us cover the gaps exploited by smugglers.**
- **I also look forward to identifying methods that Congress can embrace to ensure that federal agencies, as well as our state and local partners, have the resources they need to combat the opioid crisis on the ground.**

- Specifically, I am eager to hear from our witnesses on the second panel, each of whom serve on the front lines of the nation's opioid epidemic in various capacities, from law enforcement, to medical doctors, and addiction experts. These witnesses will give us first-hand perspectives of the challenges we face in fighting opioid addiction, and the strategies that have proven effective, particularly in Delaware and Ohio, and nationwide.
- While I look forward to a discussion of ways to reduce Americans' access to and use of synthetic opioids, this is only part of the equation. We must not lose sight of the need to also focus on the root causes of our nation's considerable demand for drugs. Until we do that, the crisis will only continue to worsen and smugglers will continue to look for and find ways around the defenses we put in place to block the supply of dangerous drugs.

- Today's opioid crisis is arguably the worst in American history. According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 33,000 Americans suffered an opioid-related death in 2015. My home state of Delaware has not been immune. According to Delaware's Division of Forensic Science, there were 222 overdose deaths in 2014, 228 in 2015, and 308 in 2016. Those numbers are staggering. Unfortunately, they are even worse in some communities in Ohio and elsewhere across the country.

- Substance abuse is a complex problem with consequences for everyone, and we cannot pay attention only to the symptoms of the problem without trying to address the underlying causes.

- We know that overdose deaths are preventable, so as the crisis worsens, we need to work together to provide critical and robust funding to help save lives.
- I think it is important to note in closing that access to health care plays a pivotal role in combatting addiction. Unfortunately, current proposals to repeal the Affordable Care Act threaten to undermine much of the recent bipartisan progress in addressing the nation's opioid epidemic and strengthening our nation's mental health system.
- As we know, Medicaid is the single largest payer of substance abuse services in the nation, paying for one-third of all medication-assisted treatments. Current plans to repeal Medicaid expansion and add program caps will only make this opioid crisis worse, as millions

**will be at risk of losing coverage for substance abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery services.**

- **Going forward, I look forward to working even more effectively with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address the underlying causes of the opioid epidemic and learning how we can bring about substantial, lasting change.**