

Opening Statement by Senator Scott P. Brown

October 4th, 2011

Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security

U.S. Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee

**“Costs of Prescription Drug Abuse in the Medicare Part D Program”**

Congress is addressing the difficult decisions that must be made to put our nation on a path to fiscal sustainability including ensuring the future vitality of critical entitlement programs for our nation’s Senior’s like Medicare. I would like to again state my strong support for the Medicare and the Medicare Prescription drug program. These are important programs that provide essential benefits to our seniors. That is why now more than ever, we must protect these programs and root out fraud and abuse in the system.

Today, this subcommittee is releasing a General Accountability Office (GAO) report which exposes the outrageous practice-- that taxpayer dollars are potentially funding, through the Medicare Part D program, illicit prescription drug dealing. The findings in the GAO report highlight this problem, for example -one Medicare recipient visited 58 different doctors to obtain 3,655 oxycodone pills equivalent to a 1,679 day supply. These taxpayer funded prescriptions equates to a street value of approximately \$292,400. Unfortunately, many of these highly addictive prescription narcotics will find their way onto the streets, harming communities and endangering lives. The GAO report highlights that “doctor shopping” is the primary way these abusers get these highly addictive prescriptions such as hydrocodone and oxycodone. The GAO report

also indicates that only a very small percentage of Medicare Part D beneficiaries, approximately 1.8%, are potentially engaging in this type of unscrupulous behavior. Though a small percentage of beneficiaries, we're still talking about approximately 170,000 people abusing the system according to GAO, which the report states costs the taxpayer approximately \$148 million annually.

This not only wastes taxpayer dollars by paying for huge amounts of unneeded prescription drugs and unneeded doctor's visits, but it also has a very high human toll. In fact, prescription drug abuse is the nation's fastest-growing drug problem and is now categorized by the Centers for Disease Control as an epidemic. We must do everything in our power to combat the suffering of those addicted to prescription drugs by enhancing the oversight of these "controlled" substances.

The fact that in some cases, our entitlement programs, which were established to benefit our country's most vulnerable, are instead being used to fuel drug addiction and abuse is unconscionable.

We have held some very important hearings over this last year, perhaps none more important than this one. I commend the Chairman for holding this hearing on this important topic and I intend to work on this bipartisan issue to ensure that Congress attacks the problem of taxpayer funded support for drug dealing. I came to Washington to ensure that taxpayer funds are spent wisely and simply put, the government needs urgent intervention to interrupt the flow of taxpayer funded narcotics to our streets and I welcome the opportunity to address the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on how they will arrest this problem.