

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper**

*“All Hands on Deck: Working Together to End the Trafficking and Abuse of Prescription Opioids, Heroin, and Fentanyl”*

September 14, 2015

*As submitted for the Record:*

First, I want to thank my colleagues Senator Ayotte and Senator Shaheen for working together to address this serious issue and for holding this important hearing today.

I also want to thank our hearing witnesses, especially Doug Griffin and the Griffin family, for their willingness to share Courtney’s story. The Griffins’ experience is a powerful reminder of the human toll the epidemic the Committee is examining today has taken in New Hampshire and across the country. It’s caused irreparable harm to families and communities alike. It’s important that we learn from their experience and from the experiences of other witnesses during this hearing.”

Unfortunately, no community is immune from this epidemic. Prescription drug and heroin abuse has been a growing problem for New Hampshire, Delaware and other states for many years now. For a sense of the scope of the problem heroin addiction poses, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) notes that between 2002 and 2013, the rate of heroin-related overdose deaths nationally nearly quadrupled. In New Hampshire, the CDC reports a 27 percent increase in total drug overdose deaths between 2010 and 2013 and a reported 321 drug related deaths in 2014. In my home state of Delaware, there were 185 suspected overdose deaths in 2014 alone and around 3,000 adults sought public treatment indicating heroin as their primary drug at the time of admission in 2014.

I’ve often said that we as a country often pay too much attention to the symptoms of problems rather than trying to fix the underlying causes. That’s the case with this issue, as well. Substance use disorders are preventable and treatable diseases. We must put a greater emphasis on prevention, treatment, and access to treatment for those who are suffering from substance abuse disorders. Our witnesses will explain how greater attention to this issue along with enhanced collaboration between multiple levels of government and health care providers can provide a path forward in addressing this issue.

Another key way to address the drug epidemic is through greater law enforcement collaboration between federal, state, and local officials. This hearing will explore what we are doing and what we can do more of to encourage collaboration and build better partnerships between law enforcement at all levels and public health representatives throughout the country. It will also examine how these drugs are brought across our borders and onto our streets, as well as our efforts to stop the trafficking of these substances.

The good news is that the Administration is taking important steps in this effort. Just last month, the Director of National Drug Control Policy, Michael Botticelli, announced additional funding for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program (HIDTA), including \$2.5 million for a Heroin Response Strategy. This strategy is an unprecedented partnership among five regional HIDTA programs – including parts of New Hampshire and Delaware – and will foster collaborative partnerships between law enforcement and public health officials to improve data and communication about the trafficking of these drugs and the availability of treatment options. Our witnesses will explain this initiative in more detail, and share their insights on its progress and remaining challenges. But we must also look beyond our borders to realize the horrible effects our nation’s drug addiction has on other countries, too.

Substance abuse is a multi-faceted problem with consequences for everyone from those who are suffering from this disease to their families and their communities. But it also is having a dramatic and deadly effect on the political and economic instability in South and Central America. As our Committee has found, so much of the corruption and violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America – Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador – and in other parts of Latin America is fueled in part by America’s appetite for illegal drugs, including opioids. This violence and corruption is a major cause behind the surge of migration the United States has seen from those countries in the past couple of years. While the surge has declined this year, we should continue to be mindful of the role that substance abuse in America has in relation to the human suffering that it causes outside of our borders, as well as within it. We must look at long-term solutions that address the root cause of these issues afflicting our nation.

As the title of this hearing indicates, it will take an all-hands-on-deck effort to address the underlying causes of the epidemic and solve it. But through partnerships with law enforcement, health care providers, the community and others, I believe that real change can happen.

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