

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs Field Hearing

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

Senator (Chair) Kelly Ayotte Opening Statement

September 14, 2015

Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here today.

I'm grateful to see so many people here today as we discuss a public health and safety issue that is devastating New Hampshire communities and families: prescription opioid and heroin abuse, and the ever-increasing role of fentanyl in fatal drug overdoses.

Solving this crisis requires all hands on deck, and today's hearing is representative of that approach.

Over the past year and a half, I've hosted a number of discussions on this issue throughout our state. At each roundtable, I have heard from law enforcement, first responders, treatment providers, people in recovery, public health officials, and other community leaders. After all, it is their everyday work that makes the real difference.

Today's discussion, however, will be a little bit different. This is an official hearing of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which I serve on in Washington. I am grateful today to be able to serve as chair of this hearing and effectively bring the committee's work to New Hampshire.

I'm very glad that Senator Shaheen, who serves as Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, has joined me here today. I know this is an issue she has been working on as well.

And I'd like to recognize and thank each of our witnesses. On our first panel we will hear from Manchester Police Chief Nick Willard about what our state's police officers and first responders are facing on the front lines of this epidemic.

I'm especially grateful that Doug Griffin is here today to share his family's personal experience with heroin addiction. Doug and his wife, Pam, tragically lost their daughter Courtney to a heroin

overdose last year. Shannon, who is also here today, lost her sister. Since then, Doug and Pam have made it their mission to share her story in an effort to help others struggling with addiction and to prevent similar tragedies.

We will also hear from Heidi Moran, clinical administrator for Southeastern New Hampshire Services, who will provide her perspectives and insights as a treatment provider for New Hampshire residents struggling with addiction.

I am honored to extend a Granite State welcome to our three federal witnesses, who have traveled here from Washington and will testify on the second panel. I'm pleased to welcome the Honorable Michael Botticelli, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy; the Honorable R. Gil Kerlikowske, Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection; and John Riley, Acting Deputy Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency. I appreciate their willingness to participate in today's hearing, which is a valuable opportunity for federal officials to hear directly from New Hampshire residents on this issue.

Solving this crisis will take a multi-pronged approach, with local, state, and federal officials working together to identify and pursue effective strategies. In Washington, I am pursuing a number of bipartisan legislative efforts intended to support New Hampshire's communities.

Law enforcement is working tirelessly to take these drugs off the streets. But we can't simply "arrest our way out of" this problem. I've actually heard from law enforcement in New Hampshire that key pieces they need to confront this public safety issue are more prevention efforts, more treatment options and more support for individuals in recovery.

The number of people who have overdosed in New Hampshire is alarming. In 2014, there were over 320 fatal drug-related overdose deaths in our state, up from 193 in 2013. And heroin and fentanyl were the primary drivers of nearly 250 of those deaths. Last year, fentanyl factored in to 145 overdose deaths while heroin played a role in 98 deaths. In Manchester alone, overdose deaths so far have increased 90 percent over 2014, and 269 percent over 2013. In all of 2014, Manchester police seized 1,314 grams of heroin. As of July, Manchester police had seized over 27,000 grams of heroin in 2015. That's nearly 26,000 *more* grams in *just seven months*.

Every corner of our state is being affected by this epidemic. Even as we sit here in Manchester, places like Laconia, Keene, Berlin, and my hometown of Nashua are also dealing with this issue. The Seacoast region is being hit particularly hard.

In Laconia, it was recently reported that the City on the Lakes had 10 opioid-related deaths in 2014, and at least four so far in 2015.

In my hometown of Nashua, Police Chief Andy Lavoie reports that already this year, they have seen 142 drug overdoses—99 percent of which can be attributed to heroin and/or fentanyl. Last

year at this time they had 78. This is an 82 percent increase over 2014. Sadly, 16 of this year's overdoses have been fatal. At this time last year, that number was 8.

Dunbarton Police Chief Daniel Sklut recently told the *Union Leader* that since last Christmas, there have been three heroin overdoses in Dunbarton, a town of fewer than 3,000 residents. Last year, they did not see any overdoses.

And in the North Country—in Berlin—Police Chief Peter Morency has expressed his belief that a recent uptick in break-ins of cars and businesses is attributable to drug abuse in the community.

We know that addiction to prescription pain medication can often become a gateway to heroin use. According to a study from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, approximately four out of every five new heroin users previously used non-medical prescription opioids before using heroin. For that reason, I have approached the separate but related epidemics of prescription opioid and heroin abuse in a comprehensive manner.

In February, I helped reintroduce the bipartisan *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act*. This legislation would expand opioid abuse prevention and educational efforts and expand the availability of Narcan to first responders and law enforcement. It would also support additional resources to identify and treat incarcerated individuals suffering from a substance use disorder, and encourage prevention by expanding drug take-back sites to promote the safe disposal of unwanted or unused prescription drugs, strengthening prescription drug monitoring programs, and launching a prescription opioid and heroin treatment and interventions program.

Earlier this year, I also reintroduced the *Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse Prevention, Education, and Enforcement Act*. This bipartisan bill would reauthorize programs related to prescription drug monitoring programs and grants for local law enforcement and establish an interagency task force to develop best practices in the prescribing of pain medication.

And I recently joined a group of bipartisan senators to call on the DEA to reinstate their successful national drug take-back days, which will start again on September 26th.

Last week, I introduced the *Stop Trafficking in Fentanyl Act* to reform trafficking penalties for fentanyl, ensuring that the law appropriately reflects the potency of this drug and its increasing prevalence in drug overdose deaths. Last year, fentanyl contributed to more drug overdose deaths in New Hampshire than heroin.

We know that many challenges remain.

For example, I've heard from some of our residential substance abuse treatment centers about impending regulations that could force them to reduce the number of available beds for treatment. This is a real concern given that New Hampshire already faces limited treatment options. While we need to ensure these facilities are safe, we also need to make sure we're not overburdening centers so much that they can't afford to treat those who are in need of treatment. I've called on HHS to work with New Hampshire on this issue and to provide flexibility in a manner that ensures safety.

There are countless other ways we can fight the heroin crisis – like stopping drug trafficking at the border, interdicting more drugs throughout the country, and decreasing the instances of drug-impaired driving. I will continue to pursue these and other solutions to protect and support the individuals, families, and communities impacted by this epidemic.

It's clear to me that we must take a multi-pronged approach to this problem and ensure that local, state and federal officials are working in partnership to identify effective strategies that will help save lives and take back our communities. I will remain committed to fighting against this epidemic on all fronts.

Again, thank you to all of the witnesses for your participation here today, and I look forward to hearing your testimony. I'd like to turn it over to Senator Shaheen for her opening statement, and then to our witnesses.