

Dennis Troy
Mayor of Brentwood Borough

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Allegheny County

Testimony presented by Mayor Dennis Troy before the Pennsylvania House Human Services Committee's Public Hearing on HB 1692 on June 23, 2016, in the Main Capitol Building, Room 60 East Wing, Harrisburg PA.

Good morning Chairman DiGirolamo and members of the Pennsylvania House Human Service's Committee. Your service to our great Commonwealth is most appreciated.

I welcome the opportunity to share with you my positions on HB 1692 or HB 1693 which deal with Involuntary Commitment for Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Drug Offense Mandatory Minimums, respectfully.

While I come before you today as a public official, serving as the Mayor of Brentwood Borough located in the South Hills of Allegheny County, I also represent a number of different perspectives for which I'm most grateful. I am fortunate to be the father of a 12 year old boy, the uncle of three, a 20 + year youth baseball and football coach and a member of a wonderful nuclear family. As I am sure each of you can understand, civic engagement whether it be through the service as an elected official or the coach of a little league baseball team, brings to real life both the exultations and tragedies in life. I am here today to present on the tragedies of what I believe to be one of the biggest internal threats to our society and country, Opiate Drug Addiction.

With the many hats that I wear as a citizen in this great State of Pennsylvania, I have attended funerals of extended family members, friends, former youth sports players and others who have succumbed to their war with opiate drugs. The vast majority of these instances began with a first battle that was initiated innocently enough by an injury or other medical condition that was diagnosed and managed by a health care professional. The health care professional as part of their treatment then provides legally prescribed opiates to a patient. This is where the war truly begins as a certain segment of our community unwittingly comes to find that they have another condition, addiction to opiates.

Subsequent battle's involve the ever downward spiral into opiate drug addiction which involves increasing tolerance to prescription drugs, the expiration of medical

prescriptions, coming up with manners in which to secure money for the high cost of these opiate drugs on the street (\$1 per milligram with average dosage at 40 mg and as much as \$200 per day) and in many instances the migration to heroin, a much cheaper alternative to prescription drugs. During this period, you find your family member or friend undergo significant change. This change manifests itself in numerous ways from the people and places with which they spend their time to the devolving physical and emotional characteristics that our loved ones begin to exude.

While the tragedy of a loved one falling into this cycle of opiate addiction, a condition that is physically dependent, is tremendous and all too often fatal, the impact on friends and family is just as profound. Watching your spouse, child, parent or other loved one heading down the path of ultimate destruction just rips out your heart.

This path of destruction is one that can be visible to all with whom they come into contact. While the dependent may acknowledge they have a problem and are willing to voluntarily participate in treatment and rehabilitation, in many instances the addiction has clouded their judgement and the dependent refuses or eludes such treatment. Left in the wake of this destruction are the loved ones who beat themselves up with the thought of “I should have done more”. This thought will haunt the loved ones of the dependent for the rest of their lives. This condition forever impacts the affected family. The impacts on family vary in many ways. The sentiment of “a parent should never have to bury their child” is hard enough, but how do we truly understand both the short and long term impact a fatality due to drug overdose can have on a child affected by this condition, particularly at an impressionable age?

As a parent I do my best to protect from harm, both physical and emotional, my almost teenage son. While I and his mother do the best we can in this regard, as we all here do, there are certain situations such as accidents that we can't protect our children and loved ones from. However, when we can identify a weapon to add to our arsenal of protections against harm, I believe it to be incumbent on us all to rally behind it and advance its use as part of our arsenal in this ongoing war on opiate addiction.

I believe HB 1692 to be one of these weapons that allows family members to intercede and help a dependent in this war. By allowing those who know dependent best to step in and help provide the much needed clarity in decision and action we can start to win some of the early battles in the ongoing war and onto ultimate victory.

It should be noted that I believe there are substantial provisions in HB 1692 that address wrongful attempts or efforts of participation in alcohol and drug abuse treatment.

In addition to HB 1692, Representative Readshaw has also introduced HB 1693, a bill that would call for conviction of the sales of highly addictive narcotics, such as heroin, cocaine and prescription drugs, punishable with a five year mandatory minimum prison sentence. This bill, I believe, is yet another weapon in our arsenal in this war.

While I do not profess to be an expert, or an encyclopedia of knowledge on the subject of Mandatory Minimums and their rates of success in recidivism, I do believe getting these drug dealers off the streets is extremely important. As a Mayor working with my 14 police officers, it is important for us to be able to get convicted drug dealers off our streets for as long as possible. Incapacitating these dealers disrupts not only their drug life cycles, but it provides a community an opportunity to extricate a cancer in its neighborhoods and to restore confidence in constituents that we are doing all that we can to address this overarching problem in our neighborhoods.

My interest in this regard quite frankly is not about rehabilitation of the dealer, nor is it with incarceration costs, it is with removing the specific dealer from our community so we can begin to rebuild. The harm created by these drug dealers who prey on our vulnerable loved ones is reprehensible. Having laid witness to what remains in the wake of the action and conduct of these profiteers on addiction and disease I am resolute in my support for 5 year mandatory minimums for the manufacture, sale and possession of certain controlled substances and amounts as outlined in HB 1693.

I am sympathetic of course with the stark reality that the General Assembly governs in an era of austere management principles and process. The cost of increasing incarceration would be in the tens of millions of dollars. However, this war on opiates in my opinion requires us to utilize all viable options available to us. Again, I believe mandatory minimums are indeed a very viable option and worth utilizing in our war on opiate addiction.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for indulging me as I present my perspective and opinion on this huge problem. I also want to take this opportunity to publicly commend the General Assembly and the Governor for passage of Act 16 which creates a medical marijuana program in Pennsylvania. I strongly believe that utilization of medical marijuana is indeed yet another weapon in our arsenal in the war on opiates.

Mr. Chairman this concludes my testimony.

Dennis H. Troy