
April 10th, 2024

Testimony Scheduling Of Controlled Substances

Dear House Judiciary Members,

As an advocate for addressing the far-reaching consequences of the opioid crisis, I feel compelled to draw attention to the alarming escalation in drug-overdose deaths that our nation has witnessed. From 1999 to 2017, we observed the rate of these tragic losses more than triple, surging from 6.1 to 21.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This period also saw the rate of deaths involving natural and semisynthetic opioids, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone, climb by more than four times to 4.4 per 100,000 individuals. Yet even more concerning is the astronomical rise in fatalities from heroin and synthetic opioids like fentanyl, where rates have skyrocketed, underscoring a dire situation that demands immediate and compassionate action.

Last year in Pennsylvania, we passed 5,300 deaths. We are the fourth highest in the nation of overdose deaths.

These disturbing trends compel us to ask critical questions about the shifts in opioid misuse and the disturbing pivot from prescription drugs to illicit substances such as heroin and illegal fentanyl variants. It is evident that current drug policies, focusing on prohibition and stringent regulation, have unintended consequences, pushing individuals towards riskier substances and unwittingly fueling the opioid epidemic's deadly toll.

By making prescription opioids harder and more expensive to obtain, we inadvertently push those struggling with addiction toward deadly alternatives like fentanyl analogs. The unintended consequence of well-meaning laws aimed at curbing opioid misuse is a marketplace pushing individuals towards substances that are far more dangerous, contributing to an increase in overdose deaths.

Research indicates a clear pattern: individuals often turn to heroin as a more accessible and affordable alternative when prescription opioids become too difficult or expensive to secure. This shift not only increases the risk of overdose but also propels individuals into illicit drug markets that are often violent, unregulated, and fraught with danger.

In light of these findings, I strongly advocate for a shift in our approach to the opioid crisis. We must prioritize strategies focused on harm reduction, ensure access to comprehensive treatment options, and address the underlying issues that lead to substance misuse. By embracing evidence-based policies that acknowledge the complex nature of addiction, we can begin to mitigate the devastating impact of the opioid crisis on individuals, families, and communities across our nation.

I extend my deepest gratitude for your attention to this pressing issue and earnestly encourage the committee to adopt a compassionate and informed approach to combatting the opioid epidemic.

With sincere advocacy,

Carla Sofronski